AN ATTEMPT

TO DISPLAY

THE ORIGINAL EVIDENCES

OF

CHRISTIANITY

IN

THEIR GENUINE SIMPLICITY.

By N. NISBETT, A. M.
RECTOR OF TUNSTALL.

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PREFACE.

If there be any merit in the following work, it is in a faithful and undeviating attention to the goſpel hiſtory, as an hiſtory of the great controverſy between our Lord and his countrymen, concerning the true nature of the Meſſiah's character; and though it is, perhaps, little more than an abridgment of a much larger work, publiſhed in the year 1802, yet the plan which I have adopted, ſeems to me to bid fair to be *a ſure guide* to the right underſtanding of the New Teſtament, and of ſome of its moſt obſcure and difficult paſſages. Upon ſome of theſe paſſages I have been compelled to differ very materially from many very learned and very excellent men; but I have the heartfelt ſatisfaction of reflecting, that the opinion

opinion which I have adopted, is, at leaſt, as favourable to the intereſts of Chriſtianity as their's, and is, as I humbly conceive, ſupported by ſuperior arguments. It has alſo this additional advantage, that it harmonizes, moſt exactly, with the general tenor of the goſpel hiſtory, and with the whole of the New Teſtament, the book of the Revelations excepted, which I do not profeſs to underſtand. I am not aſhamed to make this acknowledgment; Luther, and Calvin, and Lardner, and many other great men, having done it before me. And whoever has read what Profeſſor Michaelis and Dr. Leſs have advanced upon the ſubject of the authenticity of this book, will not be very confident that it ought to be ranked among the ſacred books. At leaſt I do not think myſelf juſtified in quoting from it, in matters of controverſy.

The application of St. Paul's Man of Sin, to the church of Rome, to which I chiefly allude, appears to me to be radically defective, upon this ground, that however corrupt

that

that church may be ſuppoſed to be, ſhe cannot, with any propriety, be ſaid to have apoſtatized from the Chriſtian faith; for the divine miſſion of our Lord is as much an article of her creed as it is of ours; and the very corruptions of the church of Rome, of which we ſo juſtly complain, are ſupported by an appeal to the authority of ſcripture. The late biſhop of St. Aſaph (Dr. Horſley) ſpeaking upon this ſubject, ſays, "It was *a conſtructive apoſtacy* never underſtood to be ſuch by thoſe to whom the guilt has been imputed." And Mr. Kett, ſpeaking of the awful tragedies lately tranſacted in France, ſays, "The whole clergy (of France) were perſecuted by thoſe who publicly profeſſed the ſame religious faith, and for no other crime than that of ſacrificing their intereſt to their conſciences. Yet more than two thirds of the parochial clergy at Paris remained firm, and the proportion in the country, where the number could not be ſo accurately aſcertained, was calculated ſtill higher. The prelates

themſelves, gave an illuſtrious example; only four out of one hundred and thirty-eight, the whole number of the bench, became what their brethren conſidered as apoſtates." See Mr. Kett's Hiſtory the Interpreter of Prophecy, vol. ii. p. 230.

The opinion which I have adopted, upon the meaning of St. Paul's Man of Sin, is not a novel one.—It has not been haſtily formed; it having ariſen from the manner in which, for more than twenty years, I have been accuſtomed to ſtudy the goſpel hiſtory as an hiſtory of the controverſy concerning the Meſſiah's character. And it has been eſpouſed by many very learned men, particularly by the great Grotius, and by our own countryman, Dr. Whitby. But of the juſtneſs of this opinion, the reader will form his own judgment from the arguments which have been made uſe of. If they are ſolid and convincing, it matters little, by whom it has been eſpouſed, or by whom oppoſed.

I ſhould not think myſelf juſtified without remarking,

remarking, that in the interpretation of Matthew, xvi. 27, I have differed from what I had ſuppoſed to be the meaning in my Triumphs of Chriſtianity over Infidelity—but I am far from being confident that I may not be miſtaken—but whichever may be the true ſenſe, the meaning of the following verſe will not be affected by it.

I cannot conclude without expreſſing my gratitude to the ſubſcribers to this work, and particularly to the inhabitants of Sittingbourne and its vicinity; without whoſe patronage I could not have ventured again to appear before the public.

Tunſtall,
Dec. 21, 1806.

ERRATA.

In page 81, line 10—for *its* read *their*.

In the Note, page 95, laſt line—for *my Key* read *my Triumphs of Chriſtianity*.

THE

ORIGINAL EVIDENCES

OF

CHRISTIANITY, &c.

THE purity and excellence of the morality of the goſpel, and its unqueſtionable tendency to promote the beſt intereſts of ſociety, both civil and religious, has been univerſally acknowledged, and is, in fact, altogether without a rival in the hiſtory of mankind. Yet Chriſtianity has not been exempt from being conſidered as an impoſture. In our own times, which have juſtly been deemed more enlightened than any which have preceded them, perhaps from its infancy to the preſent moment, it hath been treated as ſuch, not merely by the phrenzy of thoſe who have been ſuddenly let looſe from the wholeſome reſtraints of law and government, but by the cool and deliberate judgment of men of the moſt enlarged and comprehenſive minds—by men who have profeſſed that they were diveſted of all prejudice againſt it, and impartial ſearchers after truth. And it is much to be apprehended, that even of thoſe who do profeſs Chriſtianity, there are but too many who have

 embraced

embraced it, not becauſe they are convinced of its truth, but becauſe it is the religion of the country in which they live; and becauſe they believe ſome religion to be eſſential to the good order and happineſs of ſociety.

To judge of the truth or falſhood of Chriſtianity, it is evidently neceſſary to underſtand the book in which it is contained [a]. But if a judgment may be formed from the very different and oppoſite opinions which have been held concerning it, and from the unſucceſsful labours of commentators upon it, this has been found to be no eaſy taſk. "The labours of expoſitors and commentators," ſays the learned Biſhop Newton, very feelingly, "which were deſigned for a remedy," to remove the difficulties of Scripture, "are now become a part of the diſeaſe. The caſe is the ſame with the laws of God as with the laws of the land. Read a ſtatute, and you will think you ſufficiently underſtand it, but afterwards hear the opinions of counſel upon it, and their explanations, and they will explain the meaning quite away: in like manner, many a text

[a] If a perſon in reading the New Teſtament does not underſtand it, he will very ſoon be induced to read it with indifference, if not with diſguſt. It is to be hoped that the neglect of the Scriptures, ſo juſtly complained of, ariſes more from this cauſe than from an irreligious principle. Let it be rendered perfectly intelligible as to its great end and deſign, and it muſt create a powerful intereſt in the breaſts of all but the profligate and unprincipled, if they are at all capable of judging of the nature of evidence.

of

of ſcripture ſeemeth plain enough to a man upon his reading it by himſelf, and comparing it with the context; but upon conſulting the tribe of paraphraſts and annotators, he ſcarce knoweth what to think, and inſtead of that one genuine ſenſe which he conceived, he hath ten or twenty ſenſes offered to him, or rather no ſenſe at all. Commentators are a kind of neceſſary evils; there is no doing well without them or with them [b]."

It has likewiſe been very judiciouſly obſerved by the Biſhop of Landaff, that "when men are deſirous of forming ſyſtems, they are apt to collect together a number of texts, which being taken as abſtract propoſitions, ſeem to eſtabliſh the point; but which, when interpreted by the context, ap-

[b] See Biſhop Newton's Diſſertation upon the Difficulties of Scripture, vol. vi. p. 220-1.

"I begin to think," ſays the author of Diſcurſory Conſiderations on St. Luke's Preface, "that calmly, diſpaſſionately, and patiently to read the ſcriptures, with an humble mind, a pure deſire to benefit thereby, and a ſincere wiſh to underſtand the great credenda and agenda therein contained, will make frequent reference to voluminous and highly learned commentators, in moſt inſtances, unneceſſary; and will ſometimes enable us readily to comprehend, and ſatisfactorily to elucidate, paſſages, concerning the ſuppoſed difficulty of which æſtuant commentatores." P. 7.

It would, in my humble opinion, be a great imputation upon the Chriſtian ſcriptures if it did not. Whatever ſucceſs I have had in illuſtrating the ſcriptures, I certainly do owe much more to the ſcriptures themſelves than to commentators.

pear to have no relation to it. There is no greater ſource of error than this practice; it has prevailed in the Chriſtian church from the earlieſt ages, and it ſtill prevails. We owe to it the corruptions of Popery, and that infinity of hereſies which have ſo much debaſed the ſimplicity of goſpel truth, and driven ſo many men of ſenſe from embracing Chriſtianity. Every one who will well weigh the ſubject, muſt perceive the unfairneſs with which men uſually proceed in forming ſyſtems in theology. By ſtringing together detached ſentences, an Auſonius may compel the chaſte Virgil to furniſh materials for an indecent poem; and from the Bible itſelf, a ſyſtem of impiety might, by ſuch means, be extracted [c]."

It is the principal object of this work to call the reader's attention to the only legitimate method of doing juſtice to the ſacred writings, and of aſcertaining with preciſion, their genuine meaning. The Goſpels are come down to us in *the form of hiſtories*, and it will preſently appear, with an evidence not to be reſiſted, that they are hiſtories of the controverſy between our Lord and the Jews concerning *the true nature of the Meſſiah's character*, and whether he himſelf was the perſon who actually did ſuſtain that character. If our faith in Chriſt

[c] See Biſhop's Watſon's charge, delivered in 1795, p. 79.

be

be rational and conſiſtent, it muſt reſt upon this foundation, and upon this foundation only [d].

From not having conſidered the goſpel hiſtory in this important point of view, one of the moſt formidable objections has been brought againſt *the truth of Chriſtianity*, which is to be met with in the

[d] Beſides the evidence ariſing from the Goſpel hiſtories themſelves, of their being hiſtories of the controverſy concerning *the nature of the Meſſiah's character* and whether Jeſus himſelf was *the Meſſiah*, the hiſtory of the Acts of the Apoſtles contains numerous inſtances of the fact. Acts ii. 36. *God hath made that ſame Jeſus whom ye have crucified both Lord and Meſſiah.* viii. 5. *Then Philip went into a city of Samaria, and preached* τον χριστον, *the Meſſiah to them.* ix. 20. *Paul preached in the Synagogues* τον χριστον, *the Meſſiah.* xvii. 3. *This Jeſus whom I preach unto you is* Ο χριστος, *the Meſſiah.* xvii. 5. *Paul teſtified to the Jews that Jeſus was* τον χριστον, *the Meſſiah.* v. 28. *Shewing from the ſcriptures that Jeſus was* τον χριστον, *the Meſſiah.*

In the Epiſtles, the capital article of a Chriſtian's faith is, that Jeſus was *the Meſſiah.* 1 John ii. 22. *Who is a liar if not he who denieth that Jeſus is* Ο χριστος, *the Meſſiah.* V. 1. *Whoſoever believeth that Jeſus is* Ο χριστος, *the Meſſiah, is born of God.* And, V. 5. *Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jeſus is* THE SON OF GOD. Ephes. ii. 20. *Chriſtians are built upon the foundation of the Apoſtles and Prophets,* αυτου Ιησου χριστου, *Jeſus* THE MESSIAH, *being himſelf the chief corner ſtone.* 1 Cor. iii. 2. *Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, that Jeſus is* Ο χριστος, *the Meſſiah.* 2 Peter i. 16. *We have not followed cunningly deviſed fables when we made known to you* δυναμιν, *the* miraculous *power and coming of our Lord Jeſus* τον χριστον, *the Meſſiah.*

whole of its annals. It has, in expreſs terms, been aſſerted by the celebrated Mr. Gibbon, the very elegant and inſtructive hiſtorian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, that " in the primitive church, the influence of truth was very powerfully ſtrengthened by an opinion, which, however it may deſerve reſpect from its uſefulneſs and antiquity, has not been found to be agreeable to experience. It was," he ſays, " univerſally believed that the end of the world and the kingdom of heaven were at hand. The near approach of this wonderful event had been predicted by the Apoſtles; the tradition of it was preſerved by their earlieſt diſciples, and thoſe who underſtood in their literal ſenſe the diſcourſes of Chriſt himſelf, were obliged to expect the ſecond and glorious coming of the Son of Man in the clouds before that generation was totally extinguiſhed which had beheld his humble condition upon earth, and which might ſtill be witneſs to the calamities of the Jews under Veſpaſian or Hadrian. The revolution of ſeventeen centuries has inſtructed us not to preſs too cloſely the myſterious language of prophecy and revelation." Mr. Gibbon adds with a ſneer, which cannot eaſily be miſtaken: " But as long as, for wiſe purpoſes, this error was permitted to ſubſiſt in the church, it was productive of the moſt ſalutary effects on the faith and practice of Chriſtians, who lived in the awful expectation of that moment when

when the globe itſelf, and all the various race of mankind, ſhould tremble at the appearance of their divine judge [e]."

What renders this objection the more formidable is, that it really contains nothing more than is to be met with in the writings of Chriſtians themſelves, and of thoſe too of the higheſt eminence and reputation for their knowledge of the ſacred writings. The learned Dr. Edwards, who has been deſcribed as being poſſeſſed of a ſtrong and elegant mind [f], has, from the pulpit of the Univerſity of Cambridge, with great fairneſs and impartiality ſtated their ſentiments upon this ſubject. "It may not," he ſays, "be thought wonderful that Baronius and other Romaniſts, to avoid the application of the Man of Sin, ſhould earneſtly contend that the ſpeedy appearance of Chriſt was expected by the Apoſtles; (ſee Mede's Works, p. 665); but it is ſomewhat remarkable, that the orthodox father of the celebrated prelate who tranſlated Iſaiah, in a treatiſe deſigned to confute a ſuppoſed latitudinarian, ſhould aſſent to the validity of our hiſtorian's objection, by confeſſing, without reſerve, that the Apoſtles were miſtaken. (See Lowth's Vindication, &c. p. 52.) Grotius inſinuates, that

[e] See Gibbon's Hiſtory of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. Vol. i. p. 470-1. 4to. p. 300-1. vol. ii. 8vo.

[f] See Mr. G. A. Thomas's Preface to his Sermon, entitled, "The Predictions of Chriſt and the Apoſtles concerning the End of the World" P. viii.

for wiſe purpoſes the pious deception was permitted to take place; (Gibbon, vol. ii. p. 301. See Grotius de Veritat. lib. ii. § 6. Cleric. ad 1 Theſſ. v. 10.) And an ingenious profeſſor of our own univerſity does not appear to be extremely ſolicitous to relieve the Apoſtles from the accuſation of error. (See Dr. Watſon's Apology, p. 61.) But how far theſe conceſſions may be founded on truth, can be diſcovered only by an examination of thoſe paſſages which are uſually brought forward in the diſcuſſion of this ſubject [g]."

In this examination, Dr. Edwards himſelf appears to have been ſo far from being ſolicitous to relieve the Apoſtles from the accuſation of error, that, at the cloſe of it, he ſays, " I have now completed the examination of thoſe paſſages which I intended to notice; others might be added equally clear and determinate; but theſe which I have ſelected ſeem abundantly ſufficient to eſtabliſh the juſtneſs of Mr. Locke's opinion, (vide ad 2 Cor. v. 3.) that the Apoſtles expected, in their own time, the end of the world and the appearance of Chriſt. It becomes therefore," he adds, " the antagoniſt of our hiſtorian, moſt earneſtly to conſider whether the real intereſts of Chriſtianity would not be more eſſentially promoted by conceding the objection to

[g] See the Predictions of the Apoſtles concerning the End of the World. A Sermon preached before the Univerſity of Cambridge, May 23, 1790, by Thomas Edwards, L.L.D. p. 12 13.

his

his adverſary, than by vainly attempting to remove it. We need not be apprehenſive that any injurious conſequences will ariſe from the conceſſion, for as our ingenious Profeſſor very candidly acknowledges, (p. 64), the Apoſtles might ſurely be proper witneſſes of the life and reſurrection of Jeſus, though they were ignorant of the preciſe time when he would come to judge the world [h]."

A very learned writer, in a private correſpondence, has thus expreſſed his ſentiments upon the ſubject. "I cannot help thinking that the primitive Chriſtians, and perhaps even the Apoſtles, did expect *the day of judgment to be near at hand.* I think that ſome of St. Paul's expreſſions will hardly admit of any other interpretation." And, what is ſtill more remarkable, the late Reverend Newcome Cappe, who certainly dedicated a large portion of a long life to the ſtudy of the ſacred writings, has boldly aſſerted, that "St. Paul had no conception even of the exiſtence of the church on earth, after the abolition of the

[h] See Dr. Edwards's Sermon, p. 35-6.

Query.—Could Dr. Edwards be ſerious when he ſaid this? To me it appears that ſuch language is utterly inexcuſable, and unworthy of the character of a man; for no one who poſſeſſes an atom of impartiality can entertain a doubt, that if the objection, as ſtated by Mr. Gibbon, be well founded, Chriſtianity muſt be an impoſture. Dr. Hammond, long ago obſerved, that Mahomet having promiſed, after his death, he would preſently return to life again, and having not performed his promiſe in a thouſand years, is by us juſtly conſidered as an impoſtor.

Moſaic economy," *i. e.* after the deſtruction of Jeruſalem [i].

With reſpect to that part of Mr. Gibbon's objection which concerns our Lord himſelf, it has been ſaid with great confidence, and with as much appearance of coolneſs and unconcern, as if Chriſtianity could not in the ſmalleſt degree be affected by it; " We find it very evident that our Lord is recorded by his hiſtorians, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, to have declared that his *ſecond coming* was one of thoſe events which would happen during the lives of his cotemporaries. We find ourſelves obliged to make this conceſſion, and let Mr. Gibbon make every advantage of it that he can [k]."

Such are the opinions and conceſſions of Chriſ-

[i] See Mr. Cappe's Critical Remarks on many important Paſſages of Scripture, Vol. I. p. 187. Mr. Cappe ſays, " This does not ſeem to be the caſe with Peter; there are no traces of any ſuch conceptions in his writings, but rather of the contrary." Ibid. Here it is obvious to remark, that St. Paul was not *a whit behind the chief of the Apoſtles:* and he expreſsly ſays, that, *in conference,* even Peter *could add nothing* to what he knew of the Chriſtian revelation. See Gal. ii. 6. Beſides, the fact is, that there are in the Epiſtles of St. Peter, full as ſtrong traces of theſe conceptions, according to the generally received opinion, as in the Epiſtles of St. Paul.

[k] See the Theological Repoſitory, Vol. VI. p. 162. This volume being the laſt of that publication, this conceſſion, ſo far as appears, was not attempted to be refuted; and it is not, I think, unfair to preſume that the conductor of that work was unequal to the taſk, otherwiſe he could not, or at leaſt ought not, to have withheld it from public attention.

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tian writers upon this ſubject; which, I may venture to affirm, never could have exiſted, if the goſpel hiſtory had been conſidered as *an hiſtory*, and particularly as an hiſtory of the great controverſy between our Lord and the Jews concerning *the true nature of the Meſſiah's character*. But it is an obſervation as true as it is old, that the aſſaults of infidels, and not unfrequently the miſtakes and inconſiderate conceſſions of the friends of Chriſtianity, have been highly favourable to its beſt intereſts, in cauſing it to be more cloſely examined, and more fully underſtood, than it otherwiſe would have been. And there is not, perhaps, in the whole compaſs of theological controverſy, a ſingle inſtance in which ſo much advantage will accrue to the Chriſtian cauſe, as by a thorough inveſtigation of the language of Scripture upon which this objection is founded; for it will neceſſarily lead to the eſtabliſhment of the principal object of this work, the only legitimate method of ſtudying the original records of Chriſtianity.

Although we are not preciſely informed upon what paſſages Mr. Gibbon has founded his objection, yet I think it muſt be evident that, when he ſays it was univerſally believed that *the end of the world and the kingdom of heaven were at hand*, and that thoſe who underſtood, in their literal ſenſe, the diſcourſes of Chriſt himſelf, were obliged to expect *the ſecond and glorious coming of the Son of Man*

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in the clouds, before that generation was totally extinguiſhed which had beheld his humble condition upon earth, he founded his aſſertion upon our Lord's primary declaration that *the kingdom of heaven was at hand*, and upon his ſubſequent aſſurances that *they ſhould not have gone over the cities of Iſrael till the Son of Man came—that there were ſome* then living *who ſhould not taſte of death till they ſaw the Son of Man coming in his kingdom*, and that *they ſhould ſee the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven.*

As to our Lord's primary declaration, that *the kingdom of heaven was at hand*, we find, upon looking into the goſpel hiſtory, that it was a language which had previouſly been adopted by his forerunner, John the Baptiſt, who called the attention of his countrymen to *its near approach*, in theſe terms, Matt. iii. 2. *Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* And when our Lord himſelf entered upon his important office, he cloſely adhered to the ſame language, chap. iv. 17. *From that time*, i. e. as appears from the 12th verſe, from the time that John was thrown into priſon, *began Jeſus to preach, and to ſay, Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* When afterwards he commiſſioned his diſciples to preach in his name, his inſtructions to them were, to ſay to his countrymen, chap. x. 7. *As ye go, preach, ſaying*, THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND. Their public

lic inſtructions are likewiſe ſtyled, *Preaching* THE KINGDOM OF GOD.[1] Thus, Mark i. 14. Jeſus is ſaid to *go into Galilee preaching* THE KINGDOM OF GOD. In Matt. ix. 35, it is ſaid, *Jeſus went about all the cities and villages teaching in their ſynagogues, and preaching* το ευαγγελιον της βασιλειας THE GOSPEL; or rather, as it ought to have been rendered, the good news OF THE KINGDOM.

It would betray the groſſeſt ignorance of the meaning of this language, to interpret it, *of the future and everlaſting kingdom*, to be eſtabliſhed at *the end of the world*; for though, in its deſign, it evidently has a reference to it, yet it as evidently has an immediate and direct reference to *the near* approach of *the kingdom of the Meſſiah*, foretold by the ancient prophets, and more particularly by the prophet Daniel, in his prophecy of the ſeventy weeks, then juſt expiring, and in his ſubſequent prediction, that *the God of heaven would ſet up a kingdom that ſhould never be deſtroyed.*

The uſe of this language of John the Baptiſt, and of our Lord, as connected with the ancient prophecies upon the ſubject of *the coming of the kingdom of the Meſſiah*, appears, from the account of the evangelical hiſtorians, to have had a very ſenſible and powerful effect upon *the Jewiſh nation*;

[1] From comparing theſe paſſages together, it appears evidently that the phraſes, *the kingdom of heaven*, and *the kingdom of God*, are ſynonymous. St. Matthew chiefly uſes the former expreſſion, the other evangeliſts the latter.

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which they have not failed to point out, in ſuch very ſtrong terms, as to leave no room to doubt in what ſenſe they underſtood it; for, when John firſt adopted it, St. Matthew ſays, chap. iii. 5. that *Jeruſalem and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, went out to meet him, and were baptized by him in Jordan, confeſſing their ſins.* And St. Luke ſtates, in terms the moſt explicit and deciſive, the reaſon of their thus flocking to him, in ſo general a manner, in conſequence of the uſe of this language; for he ſays, chap. iii. 15. that *as the people were in expectation* of the appearance of the Meſſiah, *all men muſed in their hearts of John, whether he was* ὁ χριστος *the Chriſt*, or the Meſſiah, *or not.* In like manner, when our Lord *went about all Galilee preaching* THE GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM, the hiſtorian ſays, that *there followed him great multitudes of people; from Galilee, from Decapolis, from Jeruſalem, from Judea, and from beyond Jordan*; evidently, from the ſame expectation, (as they were diſappointed in John the Baptiſt) that he might be *the Meſſiah.*

This general expectation of the Meſſiah, at the time of our Lord's appearance, is ſo well authenticated by the goſpel hiſtorians, that all deſcriptions of Chriſtian writers entertain, preciſely, the ſame opinion upon the ſubject.

Dr. Sykes has obſerved, that "the Jews were ſo well acquainted with this language, and were ſo well apprized of a kingdom which God had reſolved

ſolved to ſet up, that as often as Jeſus talked of *the kingdom of heaven*, or *of God*, neither the people nor their rulers ever offered to aſk him the meaning of that phraſe, which yet we cannot ſuppoſe them not to have done, if he had talked with and to them in a language they were unacquainted with." [m]

Biſhop Chandler ſays, " The expectation of the Meſſiah, intimated in the uſe of this language, was not the opinion of a few devout people only, who are ſaid to wait for the conſolation of Iſrael at the time of our Saviour's birth; or of the meaner ſort, who thought *the kingdom of God* (a phraſe for the kingdom of the Meſſiah) ſhould immediately appear; but it was the ſettled judgment of the chief prieſts, and the learned in their law. They who made the ſtudy of the ſcriptures their chief buſineſs, were unanimous in this belief; the expectation was national." [n]

Dr. White, the very learned Bamptonian lecturer, ſpeaking upon this ſubject, ſays, " It is very evident, from ſeveral paſſages in the New Teſtament, that the Jews were in expectation of the Meſſiah at the time of Chriſt's appearance. The

[m] See Dr. Sykes on the Chriſtian Religion, p. 29.

[n] See Biſhop Chandler's Defence of Chriſtianity, vol. i. p. 5. The Biſhop adds, that " whenever they ſaw or heard of any quality, great or extraordinary in its kind, they turned their eyes that way, hoping that the poſſeſſor of thoſe qualities might be the man they looked for."

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woman of Samaria, though of a ſchiſmatical church, yet deriving her knowledge from the ſame ſources of divine prophecy, ſaid to Jeſus, *I know that Meſſiah cometh*, &c. John iv. 25. In Luke iii. 5. we are informed that the preaching of John was of ſo divine a nature, that *all men muſed in their hearts whether he was the Chriſt, or not*. The meſſage of the Jews by the prieſts and Levites to John, *Art thou the Chriſt?* is a ſufficient proof of the expectation which generally prevailed of the advent of a divine perſon ſuſtaining this character. John i. 9. *The coming of the Meſſiah* made an expreſs article of the Jewiſh faith, as we are informed by Maimonides, and others of that church; and the denial of it was deemed a dangerous hereſy, and a virtual renunciation of the authority of the law of Moſes."

From theſe accounts it appears, I think, with an evidence bordering upon demonſtration, that the ſynonymous phraſes, *the kingdom of heaven*, and *the kingdom of God*, mentioned in the beginning of the goſpel hiſtory, relate excluſively to *the kingdom of the Meſſiah*; and that his declaration that it was *at hand*, appears as clearly to mean, that the *Meſſiah's kingdom* was then about to be eſtabliſhed.

It appears, however, from the ſame hiſtory, that the Jews in general, and our Lord's own diſciples in particular, held very erroneous notions concerning *the nature of the Meſſiah's character*, viewing him as *a temporal prince*, who was to reſcue them from the yoke of the Romans, to whom they were then ſubject,

ject, and to raiſe them, as a nation, to the diſtinguiſhed pre-eminence of being *the lords of the world.*

This fact, likewiſe, is ſo well ſtated, from the Chriſtian records, by the learned, that no apology will be neceſſary for preſenting their ſentiments upon it. "In the perſon of the Meſſiah," ſays Dr. White, "they beheld a mighty and glorious king, who ſhould appear with all the pomp of temporal greatneſs, and all the terrors of earthly power, trampling upon the enemies and oppreſſors of Iſrael, and leading forth his people amidſt the triumphs of conquest and the ſplendour of dominion. The manifeſt expiration of the time preſcribed by the prophets, the departure of the ſceptre from Judah, and the ſubjection of their country to the Roman power, were circumſtances which, at this time, added new ſtrength to the opinion which had thus been endeared to them by early prejudice, and ſanctified by authoritative tradition. Every heart was now warmed with hope, and every eye looked forward with anxious expectation to the moment when the glory of Zion ſhould appear, and Judea be for ever exalted above the kingdoms of the earth; when they ſhould behold ſuppliant nations crouding into the ſanctuary, and Rome herſelf, the haughty miſtreſs of the world, bowing proſtrate at the feet of Jeruſalem.

"Nor were theſe glorious expectations confined to the chief rulers of the Jews, whoſe ſuperior

ſtations ſeeming to entitle them to the firſt honours and emoluments of the Meſſiah's kingdom, might have induced them the more readily to embrace, and the more induſtriouſly to diſſeminate an opinion which promiſed ſo complete a gratification to their ambition. Even the diſciples of our Lord, who had been, in general, ſelected from the loweſt and the meaneſt of the people, long retained the ſame deluſive opinion, and indulged the ſame fallacious hopes with the reſt of their countrymen.

" Nay, ſo firmly was this belief impreſſed upon their minds, that not all the frequent and ſolemn declarations of their maſter to the contrary, were able to efface it entirely from their minds. Nor, indeed, do they ſeem to have been effectually rouſed from the pleaſing dream of temporal grandeur which had captivated their imaginations, till his death had tried the conſtancy of their faith, till his reſurrection had revived their drooping ſpirits, and his aſcenſion into heaven had rectified their errors and invigorated their reſolution.

" From this miſtaken opinion aroſe the frequent ſtruggles for ſuperiority among them, which they have ſo ingenuouſly recorded. Hence the petition of the mother of Zebedee's children. Hence, too, the impatient and miſguided zeal of Peter, who, when Chriſt pathetically related his approaching humiliation, his ſufferings and his death, took him and began to rebuke him, ſaying, *Be it far from thee, Lord; this ſhall not be unto thee.*

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" To this may be added the words of one of the diſciples, with whom our Lord, in his way to Emmaus, converſed after his reſurrection. *We truſted that it had been he who ſhould have redeemed Iſrael.* This reflection aroſe from the ſame prejudice that had long flattered the national vanity, and expreſſed the moſt painful ſenſe of diſappointment."[o]

To the ſame purpoſe, the learned Dr. Lardner having obſerved that the expectation of the Meſſiah, about the time of the appearance of Jeſus, was univerſal, and had been ſo for ſome while, adds, that " with the idea of a prophet, or extraordinary teacher of religion, they had alſo joined that of a worldly king and conqueror, who ſhould deliver the Jewiſh people from the burdens under which they laboured, raiſe them to a ſtate of independence, and bring the nations of the earth into ſubjection to them, to be ruled and tyrannized over by them. And becauſe our Lord did not perform nor attempt this, they rejected and crucified him. If he would but have aſſumed the ſtate and character of an earthly prince, ſcribes and phariſees, prieſts and people, would all have joined themſelves to him, and have put themſelves under his banner. Of this we ſee many proofs in the goſpels. This diſpoſition prevailed to the laſt."[p]

To theſe teſtimonies I muſt beg leave to add

[o] See Dr. White's Bampton Lectures, p. 114 to 118.

[p] See Lardner's Ancient Jewiſh and Heathen Teſtimonies, vol. i. p. 69. 4to.

that of the late Dr. Paley, who was ſecond to no man in the knowledge of the ſacred writings. "The Jewiſh people," ſays he, "with, or without reaſon, had worked themſelves into a perſuaſion that ſome ſignal and greatly advantageous change was to be effected in the condition of their country, by the agency of a long-promiſed meſſenger from heaven. The rulers of the Jews, their leading ſect, their prieſthood, had been the authors of this perſuaſion to the common people. So that it was not merely the conjecture of theoretical divines, or the ſecret expectation of a few recluſe devotees; but it was become the popular hope and paſſion, and, like all other popular opinions, undoubting and impatient of contradiction. They clung to this hope under every misfortune of their country, and with more tenacity as their dangers or calamities increaſed." [q]

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[q] See Dr. Paley's Evidences of the Chriſtian Religion, vol. i. p. 22-3.

I hope I ſhall be excuſed if I add what Mr. Maltby has ſaid upon the ſubject, "The Jews," he ſays, "were in almoſt daily expectation of a choſen prophet from heaven, who ſhould be armed with power to deliver them from their enemies, aſſert the ſuperiority as well as permanence of the Moſaic inſtitutions, and extend over all the world the empire of the ſons of Abraham. Theſe opinions and expectations, it muſt be remembered, were rivetted with the greater force, and indulged with the leſs ſcruple, as they conceived them to be founded upon the will of the Almighty; and conſequently that their opinions could not be wrong, nor their expectations

fruſtrated.

It muſt afford peculiar ſatisfaction to the inquirer after truth, that the general expectation of a perſon who ſhould obtain—or who ſhould endeavour to obtain univerſal rule, does not altogether reſt upon the evidence of the ſacred writings.

The celebrated Joſephus, who was himſelf a Jew and a diſtinguiſhed general, in the early part of the Jewiſh war which terminated in the total deſtruction of Jeruſalem, and conſequently was perfectly well acquainted with the ſentiments of his countrymen, expreſsly ſays, that " that which chiefly excited the Jews to the war was an ambiguous prophecy, which was alſo found in their ſacred books that, at that time, ſome one within their country ſhould ariſe that ſhould obtain the empire of the world." Tacitus likewiſe, the Roman annaliſt, mentions the ſame perſuaſion as having exiſted at that period, and particularly, that it was found in the ancient books of the prieſts. And, he adds that, " this prediction had taken ſuch full poſſeſſion of the common people among the Jews, that they were not compelled to

fruſtrated. Nor were theſe the caſual ſentiments of the vulgar and unthinking, or the laboured interpretations of the ſtudious only; but they were the collective and unanimous ſentiments of the whole body of the people; inſomuch that there probably were but few ſufficiently enlightened, and ſufficiently unprejudiced, not to participate in them." See Maltby's Illuſtrations, p. 81.

reſign their dependence upon this prophecy, but by a ſeries of calamities." And moſt remarkable to the ſame purpoſe, are the words of Suetonius. A conſtant opinion prevailed throughout the eaſt that it was predicted by the fates that, at that time, the Jews would become the lords of all.

The teſtimony of writers of ſuch high reſpectability in the ancient world, cannot but be eſteemed of conſiderable importance in eſtabliſhing the evidence of the facts related in the goſpel hiſtory. And that theſe facts ſhould be confirmed by a writer who denies that there is any evidence worth noticing of the very exiſtence [P] of the author

[P] That in the Auguſtan age there flouriſhed in Judea an extraordinary perſon called Jeſus Chriſt, is a fact better ſupported, ſays an able writer, than that there lived ſuch men as Cyrus, Alexander, and Julius Cæſar. For there are more hiſtorical monuments to atteſt his exiſtence and character, and infinitely more numerous and inconteſtable veſtiges in the preſent day to prove that there was ſuch a perſon as Chriſt, than that there ever lived in paſt ages ſuch potent monarchs and illuſtrious conquerors. As certainly as Chriſtianity is now exiſting in the world, ſo certainly did its founder and publiſher ſometime exiſt. The public monuments, which the renowned heroes of antiquity left behind, are long ſince periſhed: the magnificent palaces they built, the ſuperb ſtructures they reared, the grand temples and mauſoleums they erected, the opulent cities they founded, are now now no more. Few *remaining* viſible traces are left of the battles they fought, the empires they eſtabliſhed, the ſyſtems of laws they compiled, and the univerſal devaſtation they once ſpread around

thor of our religion, is not a little remarkable—but ſuch is the fact. Mr. Volney himſelf, the daring

around them: the kingdoms they once conquered, have, by the inſtability of human condition, undergone many revolutions, have repeatedly loſt, and repeatedly gained their liberty, and experienced all thoſe reverſes to which terreſtrial glory is ſubjected. The curious traveller explores large regions in ſearch of ſtanding records of the greatneſs of former princes, traverſes immenſe countries, *once* the ſeat of ſcience and liberty, *now* the abode of barbariſm and ſlavery; *once* ſwarming with inhabitants, and variegated with unnumbered towns and villages, *now* a dreary inhoſpitable ſolitude; and even ſearches, but in vain, for cities and temples and palaces in the *very ſituation* where they once ſtood. Babylon is now fallen!—Perſepolis and Ecbatana are now no more!—and travellers have long diſputed, but not been able to aſcertain, the ſcite of ancient Nineveh, that exceeding great city, of three days journey. Few are the preſent ſignatures, in minor Aſia and India, of Alexander's victorious arms; few are the ſtanding memorials in Gaul and Britain to evince that there was ſuch a perſon as Julius Cæſar, who ſubdued the one, and invaded the other. But that there was ſuch a perſon as Jeſus Chriſt, who lived, died, and roſe again, and founded a ſpiritual empire of religion, the preſent ſtate of all the republics and kingdoms in Europe demonſtrates. The cuſtoms and uſages, that obtain in every nation, neceſſarily imply a cauſe and a reaſon, to which they owe their origin, and ſuppoſe a date, from which they commenced. Religious inſtitutions univerſally regarded, religious ſolemnities univerſally celebrated, lead the inquiring mind through paſt ages to the period at which they began, to the perſon or perſons who eſtabliſhed them, and to the ſources from which they flowed. All national uſages are public monuments of

daring and intrepid Mr. Volney, is compelled, by the force of truth, to own the general expectation of *a temporal deliverer* to come.

" From

facts, and are ſtanding proofs, through all ſucceſſive times, that the perſons, whoſe memory they thus embalm, and the events, whoſe importance they thus record, once actually exiſted. We ſee great numbers of vaſt and populous kingdoms around us, all unanimouſly agreed in baptizing their offspring in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; in commemorating the author and finiſher of our faith by the memorials of bread and wine; in worſhipping the Deity through a Mediator; in appropriating the firſt day of the week to religious worſhip; and in ſolemnizing the nativity, death, reſurrection, and aſcenſion of the author of our religion. How ſhall we account for inſtitutions and uſages univerſally received in Europe, and univerſally practiſed by all the various churches, ſects, and denominations, every where exiſting? They were not inſtituted in the preſent age—they did not commence in the times of our immediate anceſtors. We find we can follow the ſacred ſtream even beyond its ſource into ages, when no ſuch cuſtoms prevailed, when there was no ſuch religion as *Chriſtianity*, and when *Pagan* idolatry and *Judaiſm* univerſally reigned. As certainly, therefore, as the preſent ſtate of the Jews, their tenets, their ceremonious obſervances, their peculiar cuſtoms, their diſperſion into all the nations of the world, yet remaining a diſtinct ſeparate body through all the infinite changes and revolutions that affect kingdoms and communities, is an inconteſtible proof, that there was ſuch a legiſlator as Moſes: ſo certain is the concluſion from the ſtated ſolemn rites, that now univerſally obtain among all *Chriſtian* countries, that there once flouriſhed ſuch a law-giver as Jeſus Chriſt, who founded that religion

" From the time," he ſays, " that the Aſſyrians had deſtroyed the kingdom of Samaria, ſome ſagacious ſpirits foreſaw, announced, and predicted, the ſame fate to Jeruſalem; and all their predictions were ſtamped by this particularity, that they always concluded with prayers for a happy re-eſtabliſhment and regeneration, which were, in like manner, ſpoken of, in the way of prophecies. The enthuſiaſm of the Hierophants had figured a royal deliverer, who was to re-eſtabliſh the nation in its ancient glory. The Hebrews were again to become a powerful and conquering people, and Jeruſalem, the capital of an empire that was to extend over the whole world. Events having realized the firſt part of thoſe predictions, the ruin of Jeruſalem, the people clung to the ſecond with a firmneſs of belief proportioned to their misfortunes, and the afflicted Jews waited with the impatience of want and deſire for that victorious king and deliverer that was to come, in order to ſave the nation of Moſes and reſtore the throne to David." See Volney's Ruins, 3d edition, p. 285-6.

Such are the various and accumulated evidences of the truth of theſe facts, in ſo full a manner atteſted by almoſt every page of the goſpel hiſtory, that, I think, they may juſtly be conſidered as indiſ-

religion ſo many nations have eſpouſed, and who inſtituted thoſe *ſolemnities* and *cuſtoms* we ſee univerſally obſerved by all who profeſs his goſpel. Harwood's Introduction, p. 1—6.

putable.

putable. And it is particularly deſerving of notice, that theſe facts have for their vouchers, *all modern Jews*, for they entertain preciſely the ſame ſentiments, and as Chriſtians term them, the ſame prejudices concerning them, with their remote anceſtors, and, conſequently, they are ſo far *living witneſſes* that they are facts which are built upon ſuch a ſolid foundation of *genuine hiſtorical evidence*; which is the beſt evidence, next to that of ſight, which can be offered to the human mind; leaving no juſtifiable room for doubt or unbelief.

From theſe premiſes, thus amply authenticated, it will, I think, naturally and neceſſarily follow, not only that our Lord's original declaration, that *the kingdom of heaven was at hand*, related to *the near approach of the Meſſiah's kingdom*, and, conſequently, that Mr. Gibbon was miſtaken when he ſuppoſed it related to *his ſecond coming* in the generation in which he lived—but that *the goſpel hiſtory*, if it be genuine, muſt be an hiſtory of the great controverſy between our Lord and the Jews concerning *the true nature of the Meſſiah's character*. As ſuch, I am fully perſuaded it was intended to be conſidered, as affording a rational foundation for our belief in him as *the true Meſſiah*. By viewing it in this light, it will, if I miſtake not, be found to exhibit *internal characters* of truth, equal to that of any other hiſtory, whether in ancient or modern times, and it will afford evidence ſufficient to aſcertain the preciſe meaning of the

whole of our Lord's ſubſequent language, from which Mr. Gibbon has been induced to ſuppoſe that he predicted *his ſecond coming* in the generation in which he lived, to judge all mankind; ſufficient, in a word, to prove to the ſatisfaction of every unprejudiced and impartial inquirer, that the language which he adopted, naturally aroſe from the nature of his claim to *the character of the Meſſiah*, and from his controverſy with his countrymen concerning it.

By viewing the goſpel hiſtory in this light, it muſt, I think, appear extremely obvious, that having none of thoſe proofs to offer, of his ſuſtaining *the character of the Meſſiah*, which the Jews, one and all, the diſciples of Jeſus themſelves not excepted, invariably affixed to it, viz. that of his being *a temporal prince*, it was not in our Lord's power, on his firſt entrance on his public miniſtry, to avow himſelf as *the Meſſiah*, or to ſay that, *as ſuch*, he was *already come*, not even to his own Diſciples, without effectually defeating the great and important purpoſes of his miſſion and expoſing himſelf to inevitable deſtruction.

The only conduct which the nature and circumſtances of his ſituation permitted him to purſue was, to keep up their expectations of his declaring, at a proper time, that he was *the Meſſiah*; by working ſuch miracles as, in their own nature, were calculated to make a ſtrong impreſſion upon their minds that he was, at leaſt, *an extraordinary perſonage*;

perſonage; by giving them ſuch inſtructions as had a tendency gradually to correct their prejudices concerning *the nature of the Meſſiah's character*; and by unfolding to them ſuch events, as they were able to bear them, as were incompatible with their ideas of *the nature of the Meſſiah's character*; thoſe, particularly, which related to his own ſufferings and death, and to the fate which awaited them as *a nation*.

If the goſpel hiſtory be examined with attention, our Lord's firſt object appears to have been to convince his countrymen that he was, at leaſt, *an extraordinary perſonage*, by working of the moſt aſtoniſhing and ſtupenduous miracles, ſuch as no man had ever before done. St. Matthew informs us, ch. iv. 23, 24, in the cloſeſt connection with his declaration, that *Jeſus went about all Galilee teaching in their ſynagogues, and preaching the good news of the kingdom*, i. e. *of the kingdom of the Meſſiah*; that *he healed all manner of ſickneſs and all manner of diſeaſe among the people*; that *his fame went throughout all Syria*; and that *they brought unto him all ſick people that were taken with divers diſeaſes and torments, and thoſe which were poſſeſſed with devils* or demons, *and thoſe which were lunatic, and thoſe that had the palſy, and* that *he healed them*. So, in chap. ix. after a relation of a great variety of aſtoniſhing miracles, the hiſtorian concludes the narration, by a general obſervation, what was his uſual manner; ver. 35, *And Jeſus went*

went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their ſynagogues and preaching the good news of the kingdom of the Meſſiah, *and healing every ſickneſs and every kind of diſeaſe among the people.* In a word, whoever pays the ſmalleſt attention to the goſpel hiſtory, as ſuch, will ſee blended with our Lord's inſtructions, a profuſion of miracles of the moſt aſtoniſhing nature, inſomuch that the ſpectators aſked, *When* ὁ χριστος *the Chriſt*, or the Meſſiah, *cometh—will he do more miracles than this man doth?* See John vii. 31.

But the propriety of conſidering the goſpel hiſtory as an hiſtory of the controverſy between our Lord and the Jews, concerning *the true nature of the Meſſiah's character*, will ſtill more diſtinctly appear, if we attend to his inſtructions, which were intended gradually to correct their prejudices concerning it. Our Lord's ſermon upon the Mount, and, more particularly, the beatitudes with which it commences, is a remarkable ſpecimen of this kind, and will be well deſerving of particular attention; more eſpecially as there are ſome parts of it, the beauty and ſingular propriety of which, ſeem, in a great meaſure, to have eſcaped the notice of the Chriſtian world.

As the prejudices which it was our Lord's object to correct were common to the whole Jewiſh nation, his Diſciples themſelves not excepted, it is natural to ſuppoſe that it would have been addreſſed to the multitude at large, and not *excluſively*, as

ſome

ſome have imagined, to *the Apoſtles*. The evangelical hiſtorian, St. Matthew, has been very particular in ſtating this to have been the fact, for, at the cloſe of the chapter immediately preceding the ſermon upon the Mount, after having obſerved that *Jeſus went about Galilee, preaching the good news of the kingdom*, i. e. of the kingdom of the Meſſiah, he ſays, ch. iv. 25, *there followed him* GREAT MULTITUDES *of people from Galilee, from Decapolis, from Jeruſalem, from Judea, and from beyond Jordan.* And, in the beginning of the fifth chapter, the hiſtorian ſays, that *ſeeing the multitudes* which flocked to him from theſe different places, *he went up upon a mountain*, and addreſſed this ſermon to them. It is true indeed, the hiſtorian adds, that when Jeſus was ſeated, HIS DISCIPLES *came to him*; but, not to lay any ſtreſs upon the common obſervation, that the term *Diſciples* is often in the New Teſtament uſed in a very enlarged ſenſe, this only proves, what will not be controverted, that *the Diſciples* made a part of his audience. But this matter appears to be put out of all reaſonable doubt, by the hiſtorian's remark, at the cloſe of the ſermon; for he ſays, ch. viii. 1, that *when he was come down from the mountain* GREAT MULTITUDES *followed him.*

It being then clear, from this repreſentation of the evangeliſt, that the ſermon upon the mount was addreſſed to the people *at large* and not *excluſively*

ſively to the Diſciples, it will, upon examination, appear equally clear, that it was our Lord's firſt object, in this ſermon, to correct the erroneous opinions of his hearers concerning *the true nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom.* This I think will be abundantly evident, from the following ſhort paraphraſe of the Beatitudes.

The Jews, in conſequence of their expectation that their Meſſiah would be *a temporal prince*, to lead them to conqueſt and to empire, naturally enough entertained the fond imagination of enjoying high diſtinction and poſſeſſing places of great truſt and importance under his reign. But our Lord, who was thoroughly acquainted with the human heart, inſtead of directly attacking their prejudices, upon this head, by ſaying that ſuch an ambitious turn of mind was contrary to the character which became the ſubjects of *the Meſſiah's kingdom*, wiſely contented himſelf with ſimply deſcribing the diſpoſition which would qualify them for becoming ſuch; ver. 3, *Bleſſed*—or happy, *are they who are poor in ſpirit*—or who are unambitious and humble minded; *for their's is the kingdom of heaven.*

With the poſſeſſion of univerſal dominion under their Meſſiah, the Jews, it is probable, connected great worldly pleaſures and enjoyments of every kind, and the moſt unbounded national proſperity. But our Lord, knowing their extreme depravity as a nation, and foreſeeing the awful calamities which were

were about to happen to their country, taught them that a ſtate of ſorrow and humiliation was better ſuited to the circumſtances of the times, and more agreeable to his original declaration, that *repentance* was a preparation abſolutely neceſſary in perſons of their deſcription, if they really wiſhed to enjoy the benefits of *the Meſſiah's kingdom*, ſo anxiouſly expected by them. Verſe 4. *Bleſſed are they that mourn; for they ſhall be comforted.* In the midſt of the calamities which are coming upon the Jews as *a nation*, they ſhall have their peculiar conſolations, ariſing from the enjoyment of the ineſtimable bleſſings of *the Meſſiah's kingdom*; while thoſe who have in view no higher objects than worldly pleaſures under his reign, ſhall not only have their expectations completely fruſtrated, but be involved in the general ruin which is approaching.

The Jews conſidered a warlike ſpirit in their nation as eſſential to the promotion of their ambitious views, with reſpect to the conqueſts which, under the banners of their Meſſiah, they expected to make, in order to their becoming *the Lords of the world.* But to this our Lord oppoſed a ſpirit which, both in its principle and in its effects, was totally different. *Bleſſed are the meek; for they ſhall inherit the earth.* This meekneſs of temper, and patience under injuries and provocations, will enable them to weather many a ſtorm which would bear down the haughty and obſtinate, and render them

them capable of the full enjoyment of the bleſſings which this world affords.

The Jews were thirſting for exemption from the ſervitude which they were then under to the Romans, and ſtill more to conquer and ſubdue them; and their ambition was not to be ſatiated but by their obtaining, under *the reign of their Meſſiah*, an univerſal empire over the whole world. But our Lord endeavoured to turn their attention to a far different and more noble object for the exerciſe of their ambition. *Bleſſed are they who hunger and thirſt*, not after riches and honours, but *after righteouſneſs*; after the poſſeſſion of the amiable, moral, and religious qualities of the heart, and the ſolid virtues of integrity and uprightneſs. Such an ardent purſuit will yield them more ſolid and durable ſatisfaction, than the moſt extenſive acquiſitions of a mere worldly nature: and at the ſame time they ſhall have ſuch a ſufficiency of the enjoyments of this life, as ſhall anſwer all the purpoſes of real happineſs, ſo far as it is attainable in this world. In a ſubſequent part of this ſermon, this Beatitude ſeems to be more fully explained, chap. vi. 33. *Seek ye firſt the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs*, i. e. the righteouſneſs which it is the great object of the Meſſiah in his ſpiritual reign to eſtabliſh upon earth; *and all theſe things*, viz. food and raiment, and all that is neceſſary to the comfortable enjoyment of life, *ſhall be added unto you: for*, adds

our Lord, *your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all theſe things.*

The Jews confined their charity and compaſſion within the ſphere of their own nation; and had no dealings, even with Samaritans, though more nearly allied to them, both in civil and religious ſentiments, than any other people. But, in oppoſition to this narrow and contracted diſpoſition, this unſocial ſelfiſhneſs, which is productive of ſo much miſchief among mankind, our Lord ſays, *Bleſſed are the merciful, for they ſhall obtain mercy.* St. Luke's manner of expreſſion appears to be an admirable comment upon this paſſage. Chap. vi. 36. *Be ye therefore merciful as your Father alſo is merciful*; i. e. Let your mercy be as extenſive in its principle, and as far as poſſible in its effects, as that of the great Parent of the univerſe, which is not confined as that of the Jews was, to this or the other nation; but folds within its embraces the whole human race, and *is kind* even *to the evil and the unthankful.* By thus imitating the benevolence of their heavenly Father, they would have juſt ground of confidence of obtaining that mercy from him, which as men, and particularly as ſinful men, they ſtood ſo much in need of[s].

Among

[s] Dr. Dodderidge's paraphraſe of this verſe is as follows: "Far from training you up to delight in ſcenes of deſolation and ſlaughter, I rather declare, *Happy are the merciful* and compaſſionate,

Among the evils which are uſually connected with the purſuits of war and conqueſt, is the unlawful indulgence in the gratification of the paſſions with the unhappy females who are taken captive. Mr. Blair ſuppoſes, that when our Lord pronounced this beatitude, *Bleſſed are the pure in heart*, it might refer to the expectation the Jews had of poſſeſſing themſelves of beautiful captives in thoſe wars, by which they fancied that *the Meſſiah's kingdom* would be raised and eſtabliſhed. However this may be, Dr. Doddridge's paraphraſe of it ſeems ſufficiently juſt.—"Indulge not a thought of thoſe licentious gratifications, which are often mingled with victory, and are accounted as the pleaſures of the great. Happy are the men that not only abſtain from theſe groſs enormities, but are concerned that they may be pure in heart too, avoiding every irregular deſire, and mortifying every unruly paſſion. This reſolute ſelf-denial ſhall be the ſource of nobler and more laſting pleaſure; for they ſhall ſee God, and, thus purified and refined, ſhall be fit ſubjects of the *Meſſiah's kingdom*, which forbids all impurity."

The ſentiments of the Jews concerning *the nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom*, naturally led them to

compaſſionate, that feel the ſorrows of others as their own, and with tender ſympathy haſten to relieve them; *for they ſhall obtain that mercy* from God, which the beſt and happieſt of mankind need, and on which they continually and entirely depend."

cheriſh diſpoſitions unfriendly to peace; but to check, and, if poſſible, to root out propenſities ſo extremely inimical to human happineſs, and even to the quiet and ſecurity of mankind, our Lord ſays, *Bleſſed*, or happy, *are the peace-makers*; *for they ſhall be called*, or accounted, as *the children of God*; for he is the God of peace. By cultivating this peaceful, this friendly diſpoſition, they would be eminently qualified for becoming the ſubjects of *the Meſſiah's kingdom*, as a kingdom of righteouſneſs and peace, of peace and good-will to men.

A ſtate of ſuffering, though not entirely incompatible with the ideas which the Jews had formed of thoſe glorious times which they were then expecting, was not what they imagined would take place, at leaſt to any conſiderable degree. If, however, oppoſition ſhould ariſe, they fully expected that, under the conduct of *their Meſſiah*, it would ſoon ſubſide, and terminate in the completion of their moſt ſanguine hopes. But the doctrine of our Lord upon this ſubject taught them what, by referring to the hiſtory of their anceſtors, they might previouſly have known, that a ſtate of ſuffering was, at no period of their hiſtory, a mark of the divine diſpleaſure; that, as formerly, perſecution and violence from wicked and unreaſonable men were the lot of good men, ſo they muſt not now expect exemption from them. *Bleſſed*, or happy, *are they who are perſecuted for righteouſneſs ſake*; *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*; they ſhall poſſeſs

poſſeſs the bleſſings and privileges of the Meſſiah's reign; *while the children of the kingdom*, thoſe who are expecting a worldly kingdom, and will liſten to no one who does not make this a part of his miſſion, *ſhall be caſt out. Bleſſed are ye when men ſhall revile you and perſecute you falſely for my ſake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven; for ſo perſecuted they the prophets which were before you.*

The reader will form his own judgment how far I have, in the above paraphraſe, expreſſed the ſpirit of theſe beatitudes; but it is of importance to obſerve, that they are evidently levelled againſt *the prejudices* of the Jews concerning *the nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom*, and were delivered with an expreſs view of correcting them. And, ſo far, they poſſeſs very ſtrong internal characters of *the truth of the hiſtory*[t].

In the following verſes our Lord proceeds, with an admirable unity of deſign, to awaken the attention of his hearers to the great importance of their ſituation *as Jews*, and the ſupereminent advantages which they enjoyed for the promotion of the knowledge of what he had been teaching them concern-

[t] The propenſity which mankind have ever had to wars and conqueſt, to promote the purpoſes of an inordinate ambition, muſt render theſe beatitudes highly valuable in a general view. When war is engaged in for ſelf-defence, which is the only legitimate cauſe of it, they are admirably calculated to control the licentiouſneſs and cruelty which are but too apt to contaminate the character of a ſoldier!

ing *the nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom*, and the dangerous conſequences to themſelves, as *a nation*, of their not making a right uſe of thoſe advantages. V. 13. *Ye are the ſalt of the earth*; *but if the ſalt hath loſt its ſavour*, or its ſaltneſs, *wherewith ſhall it be ſalted*; or rather, as I think the original ſhould have been tranſlated, by what means ſhall it recover its ſaltneſs? εν τινι αλισθησεται? *It is from thenceforth become uſeleſs, and fit only to be trodden under foot*; i. e. as the words ſeem fairly to imply, when conſidered in their connection with the preceding and ſubſequent context, and more particularly with the 19th and 20th verſes of this chapter; Ye Jews, in the preſent ſtate of the world, are yet, as you have by the favour of Providence hitherto been, from the earlieſt period of your hiſtory, *the ſalt of the earth*, the only depoſitaries for the preſervation of the knowledge of God among the nations of the earth[u]. *But if the ſalt hath loſt its ſaltneſs*,

[u] The ſituation of the Jewiſh nation with reſpect to the nations which ſurrounded them, gives a peculiar propriety and beauty to this metaphor and the ſucceeding one, as applied to them. And it is well delineated by the learned Dr. John Leland.—"It pleaſed God, he obſerves, in his great wiſdom and goodness towards mankind, to make discoveries of his will, not merely to a few particular perſons, but to a whole nation, ſet apart as a preſervative againſt the ſpreading idolatry which was in danger of becoming univerſal. By an extraordinary interpoſition, a conſtitution of a peculiar kind was eſtabliſhed; the fundamental principle of which was, the acknowledgment and adoration of the one living and true God, and of him only. The people amongſt whom this conſtitution and polity

nefs, or is become inſipid; if by your traditions, afterwards in this very ſermon particularly ſpeci-

polity were erected, were not placed in a remote obſcure corner of the earth; but in ſuch a ſituation as was admirably fitted for diffuſing the knowledge of their religion and laws. They were placed in the centre of the then known world, between Egypt and Arabia on the one hand, and Syria, Chaldea, and Aſſyria, on the other; among whom the firſt great kingdoms were erected, and from whence knowledge and learning ſeem to have been derived to the weſtern nations. And that this was really part of the deſign which the Divine Wiſdom had in view in his diſpenſations towards the people of Iſrael, appeareth from ſeveral paſſages of ſcripture."

Dr. Ellis, in his very intereſting book on the knowledge of divine things from revelation, not from reaſon and nature, ſays, "What not a little contributed to the preſervation of knowledge in the eaſt, was God's continuing to reveal himſelf to the Jews; ſo that, in proceſs of time, the little ſpot of *Jewry* was the only place where the true God was known and taught. And ſome beams of this divine wiſdom could not but ſhine forth from time to time upon the neighbouring people who converſed with them. Accordingly, whenever we find a people begin to revive in literature, it was owing to one of theſe cauſes; either to ſome tranſmigrators from thoſe parts coming and ſettling among them, or elſe to their going thither for inſtruction. From theſe fountains they always had it, and at this fire the nations of the world lighted their own. There is no inſtance given to the contrary. Hither Athens, and afterwards Rome, came in queſt of knowledge and inſtruction. Theſe were the ſchools and maſters of the world. And though our accounts of Aſia are but ſhort and defective, yet what remains there are, as alſo their traditions, even in China, trace their original and oracles weſtward." The Jews were then, in fact, clariſſima mundi lumina, *the lights of the world.*

fied, you have made void the laws of God, and ſo corrupted them as to render them of no effect, you will ceaſe to anſwer the purpoſes of ſalt for preſervation, and being become inſipid, or of no uſe, you will be thrown away and trodden under foot.

In the following verſe our Lord changes the metaphor, but ſtill expreſſes the ſame ſentiment, under the ſublimeſt and moſt beautiful of images. V. 14. *Ye are the light of the world; a city which is ſet*, or built, *upon an hill cannot be hid*; i. e. your ſituation for communicating light to the world around you is eminently conſpicuous; as much ſo as a city which is built upon a hill and cannot be concealed.

Theſe verſes, it is true, have by the generality of commentators been applied to the Diſciples of our Lord, as miniſters of the goſpel, and they, without doubt, were in the councils of heaven, intended to be *the ſalt of the earth* and *the light of the world*. But I have, I think, already proved that this ſermon was not delivered to his Diſciples *excluſively*, but to the multitude at large. Beſides, it appears unqueſtionable that, at the period when our Lord delivered this ſermon upon the mount, theſe expreſſions could not, with any propriety, have been applicable to them, any more than to the reſt of their countrymen. As Dr. Campbell has very juſtly obſerved, " the Apoſtles were not yet qualified for teaching the ſyſtem of doctrine implied

plied under the name *goſpel*; becauſe, in fact, they did not know it themſelves. They had then no notion of *a Meſſiah* but as *a temporal prince* and mighty conqueror; or of *his kingdom* but as a ſecular monarchy, more extenſive than, but of the ſame nature with, thoſe which had preceded; to wit, the Aſſyrian, the Perſian, the Macedonian empires, or that which was in being at the time, the Roman. Not one of his hearers could have been more prejudiced than the Apoſtles themſelves were, at that time, againſt a ſuffering Saviour, who was to expire in agonies upon the croſs. The goſpel is, manifeſtly what the Apoſtles were not qualified to teach till they were enlightened by the deſcent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecoſt, after our Lord's aſcenſion [x]."

Theſe

[x] Mr. Maltby, ſpeaking of the commiſſion which the Diſciples were inveſted with, ſays, " it is obvious to remark the limited nature of their preaching, during their maſter's life-time. It was ſimply and expreſsly, to inculcate the neceſſity of repentance, becauſe *the kingdom of heaven was at hand.* What this kingdom was, they had not yet learned: their thoughts indeed were often directed to the ſubject, but their ideas concerning its nature were groſsly inaccurate. Their whole conduct, both before and after the conferring of theſe extraordinary powers, ſhews that they acted in obedience to their maſter's command, in delivering to others what he had enjoined; but that they were utterly unacquainted with the preciſe meaning of their meſſage. It ſufficiently anſwered the purpoſe, for which they were ſent, that

Theſe remarks of Dr. Campbell are ſo manifeſtly founded in truth, that not to admit them, would be to contradict the whole tenor of the goſpel hiſtory. Indeed, this very ſermon upon the mount, contains, of itſelf, very ſufficient evidence that the Apoſtles were not particularly and excluſively meant by *the ſalt of the earth and the light of the world*; for our Lord, almoſt immediately afterwards, addreſſes theſe very perſons, as imagining that to promote their ambitious views, the eternal laws of morality might be diſpenſed with.

that they ſhould exhort their countrymen to amend their lives; that they ſhould inſtruct them to expect the approach of the Prophet, from whom their own powers were derived, and from whom their hearers would receive fuller information as to the object of his miſſion and the nature of his doctrines. In conformity with theſe ſentiments, is the opinion of the learned Roſenmuller. Nihil nunc quidem ultra mandatum apoſtolis, quam ut Judaos ad vitam meliorem hortarentur, et ad Meſſiam audiendum pertraherent, à quo accepturi eſſent cætera, quæ ad ſalutem ipſis eſſent neceſſaria. Jeſum eſſe hunc Meſſiam, nondum tunc palàm temporis profeſſi ſunt diſcipuli. To the ſame effect the pious and judicious Le Clerc expreſſes himſelf. Obſervandum eſt hoc loco Apoſtolos qui mittebantur ut nuntiarent propinquum eſſe *regnum coelorum*, vix ipſos ſatis ſciviſſe quid eſſet; cum ad adſcenſum ipſum Chriſti, eum in terris regnaturum fuiſſe crediderint. Vid. Act. i. 6. Nihil ergo reponere potuiſſent quærentibus quid iis verbis intelligerent, niſi ſe à magiſtro ſuo, Jeſu Nazareno, ita juſſos loqui; cui rei addere poterant fidelem narrationem, ex quâ quid conſequeretur, elicere auditores poterant. See Maltby's Illuſtrations, p. 169, 170. And Roſenmuller and Cleric. Ad Matth. x. 7.

Ver. 7, *Think not that I am come to deſtroy the law and the Prophets: I am not come to deſtroy* either, *but to fulfil* both; to give perfection to the one and to accompliſh what the others have written of me: for, adds he, with a peculiar emphaſis and energy, *Verily I ſay unto you, till heaven and earth paſs, one iota, or one tittle, ſhall in no wiſe paſs from the law till all be fulfilled.* He therefore immediately adds, Ver. 19, *Whoſoever ſhall break one of theſe commandments* (of the moral law) *and ſhall teach men ſo, he ſhall be called the leaſt in the kingdom of heaven—but whoſoever ſhall do and teach them, he ſhall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.* And, with a view to the lax morality and the vicious conduct of the Jewiſh rulers; of thoſe who were then the only depoſitaries of the knowledge which then exiſted in the world, he tells them, that *except their righteouſneſs ſhould very far exceed the righteouſneſs of the Scribes and Phariſees, they ſhould in no caſe*— or, upon no account whatever, *enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

With a like view, our Lord proceeds to correct in detail the highly vitiated morality which then prevailed, in points of great and eſſential importance, and to introduce in its ſtead, ſuch a purity of heart and rectitude of morals as would render them the worthy ſubjects of *the Meſſiah's kingdom.*

The whole of this language, it muſt be obſerved, was addreſſed to thoſe whom he had ſtyled *the ſalt of the*

the earth and *the light of the world*, and therefore it appears to me, evident, that he could not mean, by theſe phraſes, to deſcribe the apoſtles *excluſively*, but *the Jewiſh nation*, which he however intimates had ſo corrupted themſelves as to have nearly loſt their uſefulneſs.—*If the ſalt hath loſt its ſavour, it is thenceforth good for nothing but to be caſt out and trodden under foot of men.* This was, unhappily, and notoriouſly the fact, with reſpect to this infatuated and incorrigible nation. They ſoon loſt their diſtinguiſhed pre-eminence, particularly in a religious point of view, and were, and ſtill continue to be, even to a proverb, *caſt out and trodden under foot* the objects of deriſion and contempt among all nations.

If the preceding interpretation of the 13th and 14th verſes, in the chapter under conſideration, ſhall be found to be juſt—there cannot be any difficulty in giving to the verſe immediately following, a preciſe and determinate meaning; a meaning which is replete with ſound reaſoning and which perfectly harmonizes with the metaphor of the Jews being *the light of the world.* V. 15, *Men do not light a candle and put it under a buſhel, but on a candleſtick, and it giveth light to all that are in the houſe.* As if he had ſaid—ye Jews have been appointed by Providence to be *the light of the world,* upon the ſame principle and for the ſame purpoſe that men light a candle in their houſes, namely, that all who are in them, may

may enjoy the benefit of its light. This being the design of men, in their humble spheres of action, in common life, it is for a like purpose, but a far more noble and important one, that God has placed you in the super-eminent situation which you now enjoy. In this view, how natural and how forcible is the exhortation which our Lord founds upon it. *So let your light shine before men*, you who are the light of the world, *that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*

It seems then, from this view of this part of our Lord's sermon on the mount, to have been his design, first, to give his hearers correct views of the dispositions which would qualify them for becoming the worthy subjects of *the Messiah's kingdom*, and then to remind them of the peculiar privileges which they, *as Jews*, enjoyed for preserving and diffusing the true knowledge of God, and, in this manner, to stimulate them to improve the advantages which they possessed!

I shall not enter further into the particulars of this sermon upon the mount, than to observe the effect which it had upon his hearers. St. Matthew relates that, *when Jesus had ended these sayings*, THE PEOPLE *were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one having authority and not as the Scribes.* Their astonishment arose, probably, from their hearing him speak a language so foreign to

their

their own preconceived ideas of *the nature of the Meſſiah's character*, as well as from the authoritative and commanding manner in which he delivered it.

In the eighth and ninth chapters of St. Matthew, we find the Evangeliſt narrating a great variety of miracles which our Lord wrought, upon divers occaſions, eminently calculated to arreſt their attention to him, as *an extraordinary perſonage*, and to impreſs upon his hearers the moſt favourable opinion of the peculiar excellence of his character. This narration concludes with an obſervation of the Evangeliſt, plainly indicating, what was the great deſign of theſe miracles, ch. ix. 35, *And Jeſus went through all the cities and villages* of Judea, *teaching in their ſynagogues, and preaching* το ευαγγελιον της βασιλειας, *the glad tidings of the kingdom*; i. e. of THE KINGDOM OF THE MESSIAH, which he had announced to be AT HAND, *and healing every ſickneſs and every diſeaſe among the people.*

The performance of ſuch wonderful miracles of benevolence, as was naturally to be expected, drew great multitudes of people after him. In the following verſe therefore the evangeliſt relates, that when Jeſus ſaw the multitudes *he was moved with compaſſion towards them, becauſe they fainted and were ſcattered abroad, as ſheep having no ſhepherd.* Upon this occaſion, he ſaid to his diſciples, ver. 37, 38, *The harveſt truly is plenteous, but the labourers*

labourers are few; i. e. there were many who were well diſpoſed to be better inſtructed, but there were but few to inſtruct them. *Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harveſt that he would ſend forth labourers into his harveſt.*

It is in this connection that the tenth chapter, with ſingular propriety, opens with an account of our Lord's inveſting his twelve diſciples with a power of working miracles, and more particularly with giving them a commiſſion to aid him in announcing *the near approach of the Meſſiah's kingdom.* V. 1. *And when he had called to him his twelve diſciples, he gave them power over unclean ſpirits, to caſt them out, and to heal all manner of diſeaſe. And he commanded them, ſaying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and enter not into any city of the Samaritans; but go rather to the loſt ſheep of the houſe of Iſrael: And as ye go, preach, ſaying, The kingdom of heaven,* or of the Meſſiah, *is at hand.*

This commiſſion to announce *the near approach of the Meſſiah's kingdom,* bears every mark of the truth of the hiſtory, and of unity of deſign in the purſuit of our Lord's great object. And the very choice which he made ſeems to have been eminently calculated to correct the lofty ideas which had been formed, of his being *a temporal prince* to conduct them to conqueſt and to empire. "Our Lord," ſays Mr. Maltby, "could not have ſtruck at the very root of the general received opinion concerning *the Meſſiah,* more directly, than by the choice

choice of aſſociates, mean in their circumſtances, humble, and even vilified in their occupation, and deſtitute both of talents and knowledge. Such aſſociates were little ſuited to promote the views of a prince and a conqueror; and the ſelection of them was plainly a renunciation of that pomp and diſtinction which were generally conceived to be eſſential to the reſtorer of Iſrael[z]."

In giving his diſciples a commiſſion of ſuch great importance, it was evidently neceſſary that our Lord ſhould, at the ſame time, give them ſuch directions for the regulation of their conduct, as the nature of the ſervice in which they were to be engaged, and the peculiar circumſtances and the exigences of the times ſo urgently required. And here again it muſt carefully be noticed, that it was evidently our Lord's object to diſcourage the remoteſt idea of their being the ambaſſadors of a temporal prince. While he empowers them *to heal the ſick, to cleanſe the lepers, to raiſe the dead, and to caſt out devils*; they were *to provide neither gold nor ſilver, nor braſs in their purſes, nor ſcrip for their journey, neither two coats, neither ſhoes, nor yet ſtaves.* The reaſon of their being thus totally unprovided, our Lord very conciſely ſtates, as follows: *The workman is worthy of his hire.* They were engaged in the public ſervice, and had a right to be maintained by the public[a].

In

[z] See Maltby's Illuſtrations, p. 85-6.

[a] "To convey to his companions a juſter notion of his pretenſions

In the execution of their commiſſion, our Lord goes on, in the 16th and following verſes, to tell them of the difficulties which they muſt expect to meet with, and that it would require the utmoſt exertion of their prudence and diſcretion to diſcharge the duties of their office with ſucceſs. *Behold, I ſend you forth as ſheep in the midſt of wolves—Be ye therefore wiſe as ſerpents, and harmleſs as doves. But beware of men; for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they ſhall ſcourge you in their ſynagogues, and ye ſhall be brought before governors and kings for my ſake, for a teſtimony to them and the Gentiles,* how much the true nature of my character has been miſtaken. *But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye ſhall ſpeak; for it ſhall be given you in that ſame hour,* or, more properly, at that ſame time, *what ye ſhall ſpeak; for it is not ye that ſpeak* from your own wiſdom, *but it is the Spirit of your Father which ſpeaketh in you.*

In the 21ſt and 22d verſes, our Lord proceeds to tell them of the extremity of perſecution which they would have to encounter in the faithful diſcharge of the duties of their office. *Moreover,*

tenſions and his deſtination," ſays Mr. Maltby, "and to guard them from entertaining any hope of worldly proſperity or comfort, in conſequence of being thus preferred to their countrymen, he expreſsly warned them of the perſecutions they muſt undergo, and enjoined them ſtrictly not to fear them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the ſoul." Ibid. p. 86.

brother ſhall deliver up brother to death, and a father his child, and children ſhall riſe up againſt their parents, and they ſhall cauſe them to be put to death. And to ſhew, in the ſtrongeſt manner poſſible, the extreme violence of the oppoſition which they muſt expect to meet with in the faithful diſcharge of their duty, our Lord adds, that *they ſhould be hated by all men for his name's ſake.*

Here the attentive reader cannot fail to obſerve, to uſe the language of Mr. Richards upon another occaſion of a ſimilar nature, " that our Lord repreſents to his diſciples that they were deſtined to the moſt heavy calamities which human nature can endure; not only to priſons and to death, but to the general hatred of mankind." And this very able writer very properly adds, " Surely the Spirit of truth, and a certain preſcience of the efficacy of the divine aſſiſtance, with which he intended to ſupport them, could alone have prompted him to make ſuch an unwelcome repreſentation, at a moment when every encouragement was required. An impoſtor, in commending a pretended revelation to the zeal of his deluded followers, would have endeavoured to fire their imaginations by expatiating upon its final triumphs, and delineating, in the brighteſt colours, ſcenes of permanent proſperity and ſplendor; while the intermediate difficulties to which its propagation might appear to be ſubject, would have been either entirely omitted, or repreſented in the weakeſt and moſt general terms,

terms, as unworthy of the ſerious conſideration of ſincere and able ſupporters." [b]

Theſe obſervations of Mr. Richards, as hath already been obſerved, are applied to the time when our Lord, upon his approaching crucifixion, predicted the perſecutions which they would have to endure; but they ſeem, with equal force, to apply to his declarations to them upon the ſame ſubject at this more early period. And indeed it would be extremely difficult, if not impoſſible, for a perſon who does not fully enter into the ſentiments and prejudices of the diſciples of our Lord upon the ſubject of *the coming of the Meſſiah*, to imagine the extreme ſurprize and aſtoniſhment which this remarkable prediction of the mighty ſufferings which they would have to encounter, muſt neceſſarily have produced upon their minds; for though they could not, perhaps, even upon their own principles, have expected to have been entirely exempted from all ſufferings in the attainment of the great object of their ambition, yet it was not poſſible for them to have entertained any idea of ſuch mighty oppoſition, at leaſt from their own countrymen, as to be delivered up *to the* great *councils* of their nation, *to be ſcourged in their ſynagogues*, and *to be hated by all men*, for proclaiming tidings which were equally grateful, and expected

[b] See Mr. Richard's Bampton Lectures, p. 200.

with an ardour at leaſt equal to their own, by the whole Jewiſh nation.

Our Lord appears, moſt evidently, to have been fully ſenſible of the effect which his prediction of ſuch mighty oppoſition, from a quarter ſo entirely unexpected, muſt neceſſarily have had upon their minds. And his immediately proceeding to offer ſuch encouraging conſiderations to their attention, as might enable them, with becoming fortitude and magnanimity, to execute the duties of their office, muſt, in the eſtimation of all good judges of the nature of evidence, be admitted as a ſtrong additional proof of the authenticity of the hiſtory.

It will be neceſſary to take particular notice of theſe encouragements, becauſe among them there is one which Mr. Gibbon has totally miſunderſtood, and upon which he probably founded his objection, that our Lord foretold *his ſecond coming* in the generation in which he lived.

The firſt conſolatory conſideration which our Lord thought it proper to offer to the attention of his diſciples, was what could not but have had a conſiderable effect upon their minds, viz. that by perſeverance in the faithful diſcharge of their duty, they would not, ultimately, fail of ſucceſs. V. 22. *He that endureth to the end, the ſame ſhall be ſaved.* This declaration they could not, I think, have underſtood in any other ſenſe, than that, notwithſtanding

ſtanding the oppoſition which they might meet with, they ſhould at length attain the great object of their wiſhes. At the ſame time it is not improbable that, though they underſtood him in this confined ſenſe, he had a farther and more noble view in theſe words, viz. that by a faithful diſcharge of their duty, their *final ſalvation* would be ſecured. But, even in the former ſenſe, his language plainly conveyed to them this very important intimation, that they muſt not expect the attainment of the great object of their expectations, without diligently and faithfully performing their duty, whatever difficulties they might meet with, in the execution of it.

Another conſoling conſideration, of great importance, in the trying circumſtances in which they would ſometimes find themſelves, was that, in very preſſing exigencies, it would be lawful and even neceſſary to ſave themſelves from the dangers to which they might be expoſed, by flying from and endeavouring to avoid them. V. 23. *When they perſecute you in this city, flee ye to another.* They were not unneceſſarily to expoſe themſelves to danger; nor, when they were unavoidably expoſed to it, were they to neglect all honourable means of eſcaping from it. I ſhall be excuſed if I obſerve here, how extremely remote this direction was from what would have been given by one under the influence of enthuſiaſm. Enthuſiaſts are

commonly obſerved *to court* inſtead of *flying* from perſecution.

But neither of theſe conſiderations would, of themſelves, have been ſufficient to have animated the diſciples of our Lord to endure the troubles which he had taught them to expect, without having their minds particularly directed to a *given period* of time, beyond which their expectations of *the coming of the Meſſiah* would not be deferred; when *the kingdom of heaven* ſhould no longer be *at hand*, but actually *come*. Our Lord appears to have been thoroughly ſenſible of the abſolute neceſſity of a declaration to this purpoſe, and therefore he not only tells them, that they ſhould ultimately be ſucceſsful in their expectation of *the coming of the Meſſiah*, and that, in the mean time, it would be lawful, and even expedient in caſes of imminent danger, *to flee from one city to another*; but he immediately added, and that in the moſt pointed and explicit, but at the ſame time in the moſt cautious terms, that *they ſhould not have gone over the cities of Iſrael till the Son of Man came* [c]. He did not, it muſt carefully be obſerved, ſay that he himſelf was *the Meſſiah*, but that *they ſhould not have gone over the cities of Iſrael*, in the execution of the duties of their commiſſion, till they ſhould be ſatisfied that *the Son of Man*, the Meſſiah, *was* actually *come*. Such an

[c] There is nothing in the other evangeliſts parallel to this verſe.

aſſurance

aſſurance as this, to men whoſe views at this period were invariably directed towards the expectation of *a Meſſiah to come*, was abſolutely and indiſpenſably neceſſary. And it is in the higheſt degree probable, that if it had not been given, they muſt, upon their own principles, and indeed upon the common principles of human nature, have forſaken him, notwithſtanding the high regard which they may juſtly be ſuppoſed to have entertained for the peculiar excellence of his perſonal character; for, without ſuch an aſſurance, they would have wanted the moſt eſſential, and to them, particularly at this important period, the moſt powerful motive for facing the dangers which had, in ſuch forcible terms, been impreſſed upon their minds.

It is not eaſy to imagine that our Lord's diſciples could have entertained any other idea of *the coming* here mentioned, than of *the coming of the Meſſiah*, or of *the kingdom of heaven*, which he had announced to be *at hand*; for to that coming it is evident, beyond all reaſonable diſpute, their whole attention was originally directed. With a belief that Jeſus might poſſibly be *the Meſſiah*, they had joined him, and they had lent a willing ear to his inſtructions, in the hope that he would give them ſuch information concerning him as they wanted. And the very circumſtance of their having juſt been inveſted with a commiſſion to announce *the near approach of the Meſſiah's kingdom*, naturally and neceſſarily

ceſſarily led them to underſtand *the coming of the Son of Man*, of *the coming of the Meſſiah*. Nor is there, in the ſubſequent part of the chapter, a ſingle ſentence but what relates to their conduct in executing the duties of their commiſſion, of announcing *the near approach of the Meſſiah's kingdom*; ſo that the phraſe, *the coming of the Son of Man*, is ſo fenced in, if the expreſſion may be allowed, both by the preceding and ſubſequent context, that it can have no other meaning than *the coming of the Meſſiah*. And to interpret it in any other ſenſe, is to violate all the rules of ſound reaſoning, and entirely to diſregard, not only our Lord's *original language* that *the kingdom of heaven was at hand*, but the whole tenor of the goſpel hiſtory[d].

Beſides,

[d] "Jeſus Chriſt," ſays Mr. Le Clerc, "gives here ſome inſtructions to his apoſtles, not only for their firſt embaſſy, but for the others which they ſhould undertake after his aſcenſion. What is here ſaid has clearly a relation to theſe laſt; for it is evident that the apoſtles ſoon afterwards returned to Chriſt. See Mark vi. 30. Luke ix. 10. They did not even experience any ill treatment from the Jews, who conſtrained them to flee from city to city while they followed their maſter upon earth. This coming of our Lord, of which he here ſpeaks, ought then to be underſtood of ſomething which happened after his aſcenſion, and there is nothing to which this expreſſion and what our Lord ſays, agrees better than to the ruin of the Jews. The holy ſcripture often ſays that God comes, when he puniſhes thoſe whom he had treated as if he had been abſent. See Iſaiah xxxv. 4, &c. and what interpreters have ſaid upon this paſſage. Jeſus Chriſt, according to

Beſides, if our Lord had meant, by this phraſe, *the ſecond and glorious coming of the Son of Man in the clouds to judge all mankind at the laſt day*, it would, at that period at leaſt, have been utterly impoſſible, if the diſciples had ſo underſtood him, not to have forſaken him immediately as *an impoſtor*, as not anſwering their avowed expectations; for they then moſt inconteſtably entertained ideas which were totally incompatible with ſuch an event. Nor is it eaſy to imagine how any one claiming *the character of the Meſſiah*, ſhould have had the moſt diſtant conception of ſuch an event taking place in his own time, any more than his followers, much leſs that, in a ſeries of argument, manifeſtly intended for the encouragement of his diſciples under peculiar difficulties, he would have made uſe of one, which muſt either have been wholly unintelligible to them, or muſt have had an immediate and direct tendency to diſcourage all their expectations of his being *the Meſſiah*.

I have been the more earneſt in endeavouring to fix the preciſe meaning of this verſe, becauſe, if it be underſtood in Mr. Gibbon's ſenſe, it muſt fix

to this manner of ſpeaking, ſays here, that before the apoſtles ſhould have gone through the cities of Iſrael, he ſhould come; that is to ſay, that he ſhould puniſh the Jews for their incredulity and their perſecutions of his apoſtles. In reality a thouſand evils befel the Jews from the moment they began to illtreat the apoſtles, as may be ſeen in Joſephus's Hiſtory of the Jewiſh War."

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an indelible ſtain upon *the goſpel hiſtory*; and the reader, who ſo underſtands it, muſt unavoidably be impreſſed with an unfavourable opinion of it; whereas, if he underſtands it of *the coming of the Meſſiah*, he cannot but feel how much it harmonizes with our Lord's original language, that *the kingdom of heaven*, or of the Meſſiah, *was at hand*, and he will be conſtrained to conſider it as among the moſt ſtriking evidences of *the authenticity of the goſpel hiſtory*.

Beſides the internal proofs from the chapter itſelf, that the whole of it relates *excluſively* to the commiſſion of the apoſtles to announce *the near approach of the Meſſiah's kingdom*; the evangeliſt has, in the beginning of the xith chapter, very diſtinctly ſtated the fact in the following terms, chap. xi. 1. *And it came to paſs, when Jeſus had made an end of commanding*, or, as the original word διατασσων properly ſignifies, of *laying down rules* for the regulation of the conduct of his diſciples, in the execution of the duties of their commiſſion, *he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities*.

It is in this connection that the evangeliſt introduces an account of a meſſage from John the Baptiſt, while under confinement, to Jeſus, inquiring into the nature of his claim. Ver. 2. *Now when John had heard in priſon the works of Chriſt*, or rather of Jeſus, for he was not yet acknowledged as *the Chriſt*, he ſent two of his diſciples, and ſaid to him, *Art thou he that ſhould come*; he whom we, as Jews,

Jews, are anxiouſly expecting, *or are we to look for another?*

This meſſage is one, among a multiplicity of unequivocal proofs, of the general expectation of the Meſſiah, at the time when our Lord made his appearance in the world. And his anſwer to the Baptiſt's queſtion is well worthy of notice, not only as it ſhews his cautious and guarded manner of conducting himſelf, when queſtioned concerning *the true nature of his character*, but becauſe it will afford an opportunity of preſenting to the reader another ſtriking and inconteſtable proof of the true meaning of the phraſe, *the kingdom of heaven*, in a connection which cannot eaſily be miſtaken.

The meſſengers of John, it appears, addreſſed our Lord in the hearing of the multitude, and, upon this account, it was particularly neceſſary that he ſhould be extremely cautious and guarded with reſpect to the anſwer which he ſhould return to the Baptiſt's meſſage. That he might, however, have the deſired information upon the ſubject of his inquiry, our Lord, inſtead of directly and explicitly acknowledging that he was *the Meſſiah*, referred them to his excellent inſtructions, and to the many wonderful works which he had wrought. Ver. 4, 5, *Go and ſhew John again thoſe things which ye do hear and ſee. The blind receive their ſight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleanſed, the deaf hear, the dead are raiſed up:* and, in exact harmony with the ancient prophecy concerning the Meſſiah, he adds,

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the poor have the gospel preached to them[e]. The verse following is well worthy of notice, as it appears to have a manifest allusion to the prejudices of the Jews concerning the *nature of the Messiah's character*. V. 6. *Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.* As if he had said, Happy is the man who shall not be offended at my present humble appearance, but shall own me to be the person my works declare me to be, notwithstanding I have none of those worldly honours and emoluments to bestow, which are generally considered as inseparably connected with *the coming of the Messiah*.

[e] I have been extremely concerned, in my intercourse with society, to find it to be a very prevailing opinion among many, otherwise very sensible men, that the poor ought to be kept in a state of ignorance. To such an opinion, I am happy to say, the gospel gives not the slightest countenance; and if it did, it would deserve to be treated with the utmost contempt. I must contend, that the present sad state of the lower classes of mankind arises, not from their knowing *too much*, but from their knowing *too little*. How very differently did St. Paul express himself before King Agrippa.—*I would to God that all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.* He was not afraid that too much knowledge would be injurious to them! Indeed I consider it as no trifling evidence of the truth of Christianity, that it was to *the poor*, who constitute so large a portion of mankind, that the gospel, or good tidings of salvation, were particularly addressed. And it may justly be queried, whether there is not some radical defect in the religious systems of modern times, that the generality of the poor are in so deplorable a state of ignorance.

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I cannot diſmiſs this part of the evangelical hiſtory without obſerving, that it appears to me that our Lord's caution, ſo ſtrongly manifeſted in not declaring himſelf to be *the Meſſiah*, is a very ſtriking and unequivocal proof of the authenticity of the hiſtory; for it was not in our Lord's power, as I have before hinted, publicly to declare that he was *the Meſſiah*, without effectually defeating the great purpoſes of his miſſion; having none of thoſe proofs to offer of his being *the Meſſiah*, which they, one and all, invariably affixed to *his character*; to wit, that he was *a temporal prince*, to conduct them to conqueſt and to empire.

But to return;—when our Lord had diſpatched his anſwer to John's meſſage, he then addreſſed the multitudes concerning him, in terms the moſt reſpectful and honourable to his character, declaring that, *among thoſe that were borne of women, there had not ariſen one who was greater than John the Baptiſt.* But to ſhew, in the ſtrongeſt point of view, the ſuperior excellence of his own character, and the ſuperior importance of the religious eſtabliſhment which he, as *the Meſſiah*, was about to ſet up, he adds, *notwithſtanding he that is leaſt in the kingdom of heaven*, or of the Meſſiah, *is greater than he.*

In the next chapter in the order of the hiſtory, there are ſeveral particulars which have an evident reference to the controverſy of our Lord with the Jews concerning *the nature of the Meſſiah's charac-*

ter, which will not be undeſerving of the reader's attention. The chapter is introduced by a circumſtance which gave great offence to the nice feelings of the ſuperſtitious Jews. Chap. xii. 1. *At that time Jeſus went, on the ſabbath day, through the corn, and his diſciples were an hungered and began to pluck the ears of corn and to eat. But when the Phariſees ſaw it, they ſaid unto him, Behold, thy diſciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the ſabbath day.* Upon which our Lord put this queſtion to them: v. 3. *Have ye never read what David did, when he and they that were with him were an hungered? How he entered into the houſe of God, and did eat the conſecrated bread, which was not lawful to be eaten but by prieſts only; and how that, on the ſabbath day, the prieſts in the temple profane the temple and are blameleſs*; the ſenſe of which is, that poſitive and ritual laws, when they interfere with more important duties, are more honoured in the breach than in the obſervance. Upon this occaſion, our Lord took an opportunity of aſſerting his own high character, but, as uſual, in the language of caution. V. 6. *But I ſay unto you, that in this place is one greater than the temple*; i. e. the Lord of the temple. "Therefore," ſays Biſhop Pearce, "he was ſuperior to any poſitive law relating to the worſhip of God, ſuch as their ſabbath was." This our Lord explains more fully and diſtinctly in the following verſe. *But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not ſacrifice*, or mercy

mercy rather than ſacrifice, " the ſupplying," ſays the commentator juſt mentioned, " the neceſſary wants of nature, before the diſcharge of the poſitive law of the ſabbath;" *ye would not have condemned the guiltleſs; for the Son of Man*, the Meſſiah, *is Lord even of the ſabbath day.*

In the caſe which has now been ſtated, it may be remarked, that the charge of his diſciples breaking the ſabbath was made chiefly with a view to implicate *him* in the crime; but in that which immediately follows, the attack is made directly upon our Lord himſelf. V. 9. *And when he was departed thence, he went into their ſynagogue, and behold there was a man who had his hand withered; and they aſked him, ſaying, Is it lawful to heal on the ſabbath day? that they might accuſe him.* To which our Lord thus replied, v. 11, *What man ſhall there be among you that ſhall have one ſheep, and if it fall into a pit on the ſabbath day, will he not lay hold on it and lift it out? How much better then is a man than a ſheep?* From this reaſoning, which ſcarcely admitted of any reply, our Lord draws this concluſion, v. 12, *Wherefore it is lawful to do good on the ſabbath day. Then ſaid he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand; and he ſtretched it forth, and it was reſtored whole as the other.* But no force of reaſoning, no action of beneficence, however great, appears to have had any effect upon the minds of theſe unprincipled and worthleſs men. So far were they from ſhewing any pleaſure at ſeeing a fellow-

fellow-creature relieved from a grievous malady, the evangeliſt ſays, v. 14, *They went out and held a council againſt him, how they might deſtroy him.* They were offended at him for doing an act of real benevolence on the ſabbath day; while they themſelves, as Dr. Macknight has well obſerved, were profaning it by an action which would have polluted any day, ſeeking an opportunity of murdering one who had never done them any harm, but a great deal of good. *But when Jeſus knew their* malicious *deſign, he withdrew himſelf from thence, and great multitudes followed him, and,* notwithſtanding the ungrateful treatment he had juſt met with, *he healed them all, and charged them that they ſhould not make him known. And thus,* ſays the evangeliſt, *was fulfilled in him the prophecy of Iſaiah, ſaying,* v. 18, *Behold my ſervant, whom I have choſen; my beloved, in whom my ſoul is well pleaſed. I will put my ſpirit upon him, and he ſhall ſhew judgment to the Gentiles. He ſhall not ſtrive nor cry,* ſhall make no noiſy and oſtentatious claims to the character of the Meſſiah; *neither ſhall any man hear his voice* aſſerting thoſe claims *in the ſtreets.* On the contrary, he withdrew himſelf as much as poſſible from public notice, and forbad thoſe whom he had healed to ſpread abroad his fame. *A bruiſed reed ſhall he not break, and ſmoking flax ſhall he not quench, until he ſend forth judgment unto victory*; or, as Dr. Campbel has rendered it, till he render his laws victorious. He ſhall be ſo mild and gentle in his demeanour,

demeanour, ſo attentive to the ſentiments and prejudices of the well diſpoſed, as gradually to eſtabliſh the truth of his claim to *the character of the Meſſiah.* V. 21. *And, in his name ſhall the Gentiles truſt.*

In the 22d verſe, the hiſtorian proceeds to relate a miraculous cure which our Lord had effected. *Then was brought unto him one poſſeſſed with a devil,* or demon, *blind and dumb, and he healed him: inſomuch that the blind and dumb* perſon *both ſpake and ſaw.* Upon this it is ſaid, v. 23, that *all the people were amazed, and ſaid, Is not this the Son of David?* evidently meaning, by this queſtion, that they ſuppoſed that he might be *the Chriſt,* or the Meſſiah, whom they were then ſo earneſtly expecting. Such a queſtion from the mouth of the common people, rouſed the jealouſy, and excited an alarm in the minds of the unprincipled Phariſees, leſt they ſhould be induced to acknowledge that he was *the Meſſiah,* being themſelves regardleſs of the proof which he had juſt given that he was, if not *the Meſſiah,* at leaſt *an extraordinary perſonage.* Unable, however, to deny *the reality of the miracle,* and unwilling to ſuffer even a ſuſpicion of his being *the Meſſiah,* to get poſſeſſion of the minds of the common people, they rather choſe malignantly to attribute the miracle to his connection with demons. V. 24. *But when the Phariſees heard it, they ſaid, This fellow doth not caſt out demons but by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons.*

If ever language was capable of rouſing an honeſt and virtuous indignation, eſpecially when the nature of the miracle which occaſioned it is conſidered, ſurely this was! But what was the anſwer of our Lord to the infamous ſuggeſtions of theſe profligate and unprincipled men? Why he condeſcended to reaſon with them upon the extreme abſurdity of their ſuppoſition, and that in a language which was, in the higheſt degree, calm and temperate, and fraught with a ſtrength of argument which nothing could exceed, and which admitted of no reply. V. 25, &c. *Every kingdom divided againſt itſelf is brought to deſolation, and every city or houſe divided againſt itſelf will not ſtand. And if Satan caſt out Satan, how ſhall then his kingdom ſtand? And if I, by Beelzebub, caſt out devils, by whom do your children caſt them out? Therefore they ſhall be your judges. But if I, by the Spirit of God, caſt out devils, then is the kingdom of God come unto you.*

By *the kingdom of God* it is hardly poſſible to doubt that our Lord here meant *the kingdom of the Meſſiah*, which he had announced to be *at hand*; and it appears to have been the chief object of his diſcourſe, upon this occaſion, to prove that the conjecture of the people, which had given ſuch offence to the Phariſees—*Is not this the Son of David?* was well founded. But while our Lord, in his reply to the ſhameleſs and unprincipled cavils of the Scribes and Phariſees, manifeſted the utmoſt coolneſs of temper, and the moſt perfect ſelf-command,

mand, he nevertheleſs expreſſed his moſt unqualified ſenſe of the heinouſneſs of their crime, in aſcribing miracles of the pureſt benevolence to a diabolical influence, as proceeding from the moſt rooted depravity, and the moſt hardened determination of reſiſting all evidence, however ſtrong, which was not ſuited to their ambitious and ſelf-intereſted views. This every one muſt acknowledge he might have done with the moſt unruffled temper and the moſt perfect compoſure. And, ſurely, it will be allowed that no occaſion could ever have more juſtly called for a ſevere cenſure, than the aſcribing a miracle which reſtored ſpeech and hearing to an unfortunate man, to ſuch a cauſe! If this was not criminality, in the higheſt degree, what can deſerve the name of criminality?

And here I cannot refrain from obſerving, that our Lord frequently urged the miracles which he wrought as proofs that he was *the Meſſiah. Go and ſhew John again thoſe things that ye do hear and ſee— If I, by the Spirit* or power of God *caſt out devils, then is the kingdom of God come unto you.* And yet it ſeems to be becoming a faſhionable doctrine that Chriſtianity requires, in proof of its truth, neither prophecies nor miracles, though the latter are interwoven in almoſt every page of the goſpel hiſtory. Indeed it is difficult to conceive upon what principle they can be rejected, without rejecting the whole ſyſtem. If the miracles of the goſpel were not wrought, it is almoſt impoſſible to avoid

the concluſion, that the Author of our religion was the greateſt impoſtor that ever exiſted. And if they were, they afforded evidence, of a very ſuperior kind, of the truth of his miſſion; *for no man could do ſuch miracles except God was with him.*

But to return from this digreſſion—our Lord having, from his very forcible and unanſwerable reaſoning with the Phariſees, drawn the concluſion that *the kingdom of God*, or of the Meſſiah, *was come*, or rather was coming *to them*[e], certain of the Scribes appear to have ſeized with avidity upon this declaration, ſaying, v. 38, *Maſter, we would ſee a ſign from thee*; meaning probably, *the ſign of the Son of Man*, mentioned by the prophet Daniel, *coming in the clouds of heaven*; which they interpreted, of his coming to take vengeance on their enemies. But he anſwered, v. 39, and ſaid to them, *An evil and adulterous generation ſeeketh after a ſign, and there ſhall no ſign be given to it*, ſuch as is expected by you, *but the ſign of the prophet Jonas; for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, ſo ſhall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*

In the two following verſes, our Lord compares the conduct of the Jews with that of the Ninevites

[e] The ſame word which is uſed here, is likewiſe uſed by St. Paul, 1 Theſſ. ii. 16, and is applied by him to *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, which was then only *approaching*. The Greek word here rendered *is come*, being an aoriſt, ſeems to be uſed for the paulo poſt futurum, to denote *the near approach of the kingdom of heaven*, or of the Meſſiah. See Dr. Benſon on 1 Theſſ. ii. 16, and my Triumphs of Chriſtianity, p. 57.

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and of the Queen of Sheba; both of which inſtances carried a ſevere cenſure upon theirs; and he aſſerts, in ſtrong, but, as uſual, in very cautious terms, the high dignity of his own character. V. 41, *The men of Nineveh ſhall riſe up in judgment againſt this generation, and ſhall condemn it; becauſe they repented at the preaching of Jonas. And, behold a greater than Jonas,* meaning himſelf, *is here. The queen of the ſouth ſhall riſe up in judgment againſt this generation, and ſhall condemn it; for ſhe came from the uttermoſt parts of the earth to hear the wiſdom of Solomon, and behold a greater than Solomon is here.* The argument is then concluded in the following manner: v. 43, *When an unclean ſpirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through,* ανυδρων τοπων, *parched deſerts, ſeeking reſt, and findeth none. Then he ſaith, I will return to my houſe from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, ſwept, and garniſhed,* fit for the reception of the gueſt who had quitted it. *Then goeth he and taketh to himſelf ſeven other ſpirits more wicked than himſelf, and they enter in and dwell there, and the laſt ſtate of that man is worſe than the firſt. Even ſo ſhall it be alſo unto this wicked generation.* Biſhop Pearce has thus conciſely expreſſed the deſign of this parable. "The more I do for reforming this generation, the worſe it will be."

I have dwelt longer upon the conſideration of the contents of this chapter, than was perhaps abſolutely

ſolutely neceſſary; but it ſeems ſo ſtrongly to confirm *the extreme propriety* of viewing the goſpel hiſtory, as an hiſtory of the controverſy between our Lord and the Jews concerning *the true nature of the Meſſiah's character*, and ſo accurately fixes the genuine meaning of the phraſe, *the kingdom of God*, in the 28th verſe, that the reader will not, I am perſuaded, conſider his labour loſt in the peruſal of it. I muſt not, however, omit to introduce to his notice the concluſion of it; which, for genuine ſimplicity, and the moſt correct and refined taſte of the ſuperior importance of the duties which men owe to the Supreme Being, moſt certainly ſtands without a rival. V. 46, &c. *While he was yet talking to the people, behold his mother and his brethren ſtood without deſiring to ſpeak to him. Then one ſaid to him, Behold thy mother and thy brethren ſtand without, deſiring to ſpeak to thee. But he anſwered, and ſaid to him that told him, Who is my mother, and who are my brethren? And he ſtretched forth his hand towards his diſciples, and ſaid, Behold my mother and my brethren; for whoſoever ſhall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, the ſame is my brother, and ſiſter, and mother.* The force of this hiſtorical anecdote is irreſiſtible, and when it is conſidered as the unpremeditated thought of the moment, it at once ſhews the ſeperior wiſdom and the unrivalled excellence of the mind which dictated it!

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The limits which I have prescribed to this work forbid the following the exact order of the history any further. I shall therefore proceed, immediately, to a most interesting and important conversation which arose between our Lord and his disciples, respecting the opinion which was entertained among his countrymen concerning him. And it is thus introduced by the evangelical historian, ch. xvi. 13. *When Jesus came into the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi*, or into the country which was under the jurisdiction of Philip, *he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some Elias; and others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.* From this account of the public opinion concerning our Lord, it appears that however various their conjectures concerning him were, all were agreed that he was *an extraordinary personage.* Our Lord then asked them, What was their own opinion of the *nature of his character*; or who they thought him to be? V. 15, *But whom say ye that I am?* To which the apostle Peter, without hesitation, replied, *Thou art* ὁ χριστος, *the Christ*,[f] or the Messiah, *the Son of the living God.*

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[f] Dr. Campbell, speaking of the word *Christ*, says, "If we were to judge by the common version, or even by most versions into modern tongues, we should consider the word as rather a proper name than an appellative or name of office, and should think of it only as a surname given to our Lord.

The reader has here before him an unequivocal proof, not only of the extreme propriety of con-

Our tranſlators have contributed greatly to this miſtake, by very ſeldom prefixing the article before *Chriſt*, though it is rarely wanting in the original. The word *Chriſt* was at firſt as much an appellative as the word *baptiſt* was, and the one was as regularly accompanied with the article as the other. Yet our tranſlators, who always ſay *the Baptiſt*, have, one would think, ſtudiouſly avoided ſaying *the Chriſt*. This may appear to ſuperficial readers an inconſiderable difference; but the addition of the article will be found, when attended to, of real conſequence for conveying the meaning in Engliſh, with the ſame perſpicuity and propriety with which it is conveyed in Greek. So much virtue there is in the article, which, in our idiom, is never prefixed to the name of a man, though it is invariably prefixed to a name of office (unleſs where ſome pronoun, or other appropriating expreſſion, renders it unneceſſary), that without it the ſenſe is always darkened, and ſometimes marred. Thus in ſuch expreſſions as theſe: *This Jeſus whom I preach unto you is Chriſt. Paul teſtified to the Jews that Jeſus was Chriſt. Showing that Jeſus was Chriſt:* the unlearned reader forms no diſtinct apprehenſion, as the common application of the words leads him uniformly to conſider Jeſus and Chriſt as no other than the name and the ſurname of the ſame perſon. It would have conveyed to ſuch a reader preciſely the ſame meaning, to have ſaid, *Paul teſtified to the Jews that Chriſt was Jeſus*; and ſo of the reſt. The article alone, therefore, in ſuch caſes, adds conſiderable light to the expreſſion; yet no more than what the words of the hiſtorian manifeſtly convey to every reader who underſtands his language. It ſhould be, therefore, Paul teſtified to the Jews that Jeſus was the Chriſt, or the Meſſiah, &c. Many other examples might be brought to the ſame purpoſe; but theſe are ſufficient." See Campbell's Diſſertations, vol. i. p. 169, 170. Quarto edition.

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ſidering the goſpel hiſtory as an hiſtory of the controverſy concerning *the nature of the Meſſiah's character*, but of the diſciples themſelves not having, till this period, acknowledged that Jeſus was *the Meſſiah*. And indeed, if the ſtate of things, at the time when this converſation took place, be attentively conſidered; it will appear that it required no ſmall exerciſe of faith in the integrity of our Lord's character to have made this noble confeſſion; for there were then no ſigns, and indeed could not be, from the nature of his character, which, till after this period, his diſciples had invariably affixed to it, which could at all have led them to think their favourite idea of *a worldly kingdom* was about to be realized. And it is particularly deſerving of notice, from St. Peter's account of the ſentiments of the people at large, that their opinion of him was perfectly ſingular: ſome ſaying that he was John the Baptiſt; ſome that he was Elias; and others that he was Jeremiah, or one of the prophets; but none that he was ὁ χριστος, *the Chriſt*, or the Meſſiah, but themſelves. This has been thought extraordinary, and it has been conſidered as not eaſily to be accounted for, from the known and acknowledged ſentiments which they then unqueſtionably held concerning *the nature of the Meſſiah's character*, which moſt certainly were not materially different from thoſe of the reſt of their countrymen.

But ſurely there is nothing contrary to probability

lity in their ſuppoſing that he might be *the Meſſiah* whom they ſo earneſtly expected, though he had, as yet, not given them the grand diſtinguiſhing proof of it which they affixed to it, namely, his being *a temporal prince*. They had heard him declare that *the kingdom of heaven*, or of the Meſſiah, *was at hand*; and in conſequence of that declaration they had joined him, upon the belief, or at leaſt upon the hope, that he might poſſibly be *the Meſſiah*. They had themſelves received a commiſſion from him to announce to their countrymen the glad tidings of *its near approach*. They had ſeen him perform numerous miracles, which very fully evinced that he was *an extraordinary perſonage*; and this, from their own account, was the general opinion. And, from an intimate acquaintance with him, they did not entertain the leaſt doubt of the perfect integrity of his perſonal character. He had likewiſe publicly declared, that he was *greater than Jonas, greater than the queen of the ſouth, greater than Solomon, and greater than the temple*, though he had not declared that he was *the Meſſiah*. If to all this it be added, that they had frequent opportunities of obſerving the ſuperior excellence and ſublimity of his inſtructions, his unaffected piety to God, his unexampled diſintereſtedneſs, and his generous benevolence and philanthropy; and it will, perhaps, in no reſpect be found to be improbable or unnatural that they ſhould declare that they believed that he was *the Meſſiah*. Beſides, it

ſhould

ſhould be obſerved that, by their continuing to follow him with ſuch unſhaken perſeverance, they pretty ſtrongly declared their full expectation that the time would come when he would publicly manifeſt himſelf as *the Meſſiah*.

But this premature declaration of St. Peter, as it has been termed, that Jeſus was *the Meſſiah*, is, perhaps, beſt accounted for by our Lord himſelf, in the remarkable eulogium which St. Peter's noble confeſſion drew from him, and fully juſtifies the ſuppoſition that his excellent inſtructions, and the wonderful works which he had wrought, had compelled him to make it. V. 17, *Bleſſed art thou Simon, ſon of Jonah; for fleſh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven:* q. d. Had you conſulted fleſh and blood only, your national prejudices and ſecular views, with reſpect to *the nature of the Meſſiah's character*, you would never, under the preſent circumſtances and appearances of things, have made the acknowledgment which you have now done; but the doctrines which I have taught you, and the miracles which I have performed in the name and by the authority of my Father, have, upon this occaſion, plainly influenced your judgment, contrary to all human appearances, and extorted from you a confeſſion which no other conſideration could have induced you to have made. It is, indeed, hardly poſſible to ſuppoſe that the diſciples could have avoided giving our Lord a conſiderable degree of credit,

credit, even upon their own principles, eſpecially after they had ſuch opportunities of knowing his general character, that he would, at a proper time, give them the neceſſary proofs that he actually was *the Meſſiah*. And that they did, in fact, give him that credit, and that Peter's declaration that he was *the Meſſiah*, was founded upon it, ſeems to require no other proof than the queſtions which they put to him at a period conſiderably ſubſequent to this; for when our Lord had been predicting *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, they were ſo amazed and confounded at the prediction, ſo contrary to all their ideas of *the nature of the Meſſiah's character*, that they aſked him, *When ſhall theſe things be?* And if, as you ſay, they muſt be, *What ſhall be the ſign of thy coming?* meaning, as will hereafter very fully appear, of *his coming as the Meſſiah*. And, even after our Lord's reſurrection, they again aſked him, in terms which appear to be free from all ambiguity, *When he would reſtore the kingdom to Iſrael?*

This remarkable confeſſion of St. Peter, being contrary to all preſent appearances, and to the general ideas which then prevailed among the Jews concerning *the nature of the Meſſiah's character*, it was evidently abſolutely neceſſary that the diſciples ſhould not be ſuffered to make their opinion of him public. Our Lord, whoſe prudent attention to the circumſtances of things, appears never for a moment to have forſaken him, foreſeeing the injurious conſequences to the ſucceſs of his miſſion

of

of ſuch a public diſcloſure, thought it proper, upon the ſame principles and for the ſame reaſons which had hitherto influenced his own conduct, to give his diſciples a ſtrict injunction not to tell any one that he was *the Meſſiah*. V. 20, *Then charged he his diſciples that they ſhould tell no man that he was* ὁ χριστος, *the Chriſt*, or the Meſſiah.[g]

This caution, it has juſt been hinted, perfectly harmonizes with our Lord's general conduct, as well as with his admirable precept *to be wiſe as ſerpents and harmleſs as doves*. And it was, for this obvious reaſon, upon this occaſion abſolutely neceſſary; becauſe, if once ſuch an opinion ſhould be diſſeminated amongſt the great body of the people, by his own diſciples, by thoſe who were known to be upon the moſt intimate footing with him, it might not only have created *popular tumults and inſurrections* in his favour, which he at all times appears moſt carefully to have avoided; but, in all human probability, it would have entirely defeated the great and important purpoſes of his miſſion. The Author of Chriſtianity not founded on Argument, has, in his peculiarly inſidious manner, dwelt much upon this prohibition of our Lord, and in general upon his extreme caution in refuſing to declare that he was *the Meſſiah*; but the reaſon here ſtated for this conduct, appears to be ſo ſatisfactory, that even infidelity itſelf muſt be

[g] See the ſame prohibition Mark viii. 30. Luke ix. 21.

obliged

obliged to acknowledge its force. And, in the preſent inſtance, our Lord's prohibition muſt be conſidered as one genuine and authentic evidence of *the truth of the hiſtory*; for it was upon no account ſafe or proper, under exiſting circumſtances, to have divulged the opinion that he was the *Meſſiah*, when, from the diſciples' own ſtatement, it appears that they were ſingular in that opinion.

But our Lord did not ſtop here. He not only foreſaw the abſolute neceſſity of this prohibition; but as he had, by his decided approbation of St. Peter's confeſſion, acknowledged that he was *the Meſſiah*, he clearly perceived the further neceſſity of effectually checking any propenſity which they might have to break through his injunction, and of repreſſing any ſecular views which might now, with redoubled force, begin to operate upon the minds of the diſciples, with reſpect to their beloved Maſter's aſſuming *the character of the Meſſiah!* For, it muſt carefully be noted, that though they had expreſsly acknowledged that he was *the Meſſiah*, they ſtill continued to retain all their worldly prejudices concerning *the nature of his character*. One deciſive proof of this is, that even after his reſurrection they ſaid to him, *Lord, wilt thou at this time reſtore the kingdom to Iſrael?* It was, therefore, with the moſt conſummate wiſdom that our Lord choſe this opportunity of informing them, in a very particular and circumſtantial manner, of the ſufferings which he himſelf, in the courſe of his miniſtry,

miniſtry, had to undergo. And nothing, ſurely, could have been more admirably adapted for the obtaining of his purpoſe than ſuch a diſcovery. V. 21, *From that time forth*, i. e. from the time that he had charged them to tell no man that he was the Chriſt, or the Meſſiah, *began Jeſus to ſhew to his diſciples, how that he muſt go to Jeruſalem and ſuffer many things from the Elders and chief Prieſts and Scribes, and be killed, and raiſed again the third day.*

When our Lord had forewarned his diſciples of the great troubles to which they would be expoſed in the execution of their commiſſion of announcing *the near approach of the Meſſiah's kingdom*, there is not the ſlighteſt intimation of their having expoſtulated with him upon the ſubject, or that they ſhewed the leaſt ſymptom of diſſatisfaction at the hardſhips of their lot; though he, at the ſame time, particularly informed them that they were ſuch as awaited himſelf; and for this reaſon, probably, that they could not, even upon their own principles, have expected that the great purpoſes of his miſſion, as the Meſſiah, could be attained, without both themſelves and their beloved Maſter being expoſed to ſome difficulties. But no ſooner did our Lord enter into further particulars, and foretel, in the cloſeſt connection with an acknowledgment made by themſelves, and with our Lord's decided approbation of that acknowledgment, that he was *the Meſſiah*, that ſuch ſufferings awaited him

him as would terminate in a violent and ignominious death, and that from the hands of his own countrymen; from the elders, the chief prieſts, and the ſcribes, than they immediately took the alarm; and well they might; for ſufferings like theſe, and from ſuch a quarter too, were ſo totally incompatible with all the ideas which they had previouſly affixed to *the Meſſiah's character*, that they could no longer keep ſilence. V. 22, *Then Peter took him and began to rebuke him, ſaying, Be it far from thee, Lord; this ſhall not be unto thee.*

This language pretty ſtrongly marks St. Peter's ſentiments of our Lord's prediction. But the evangelical hiſtorians have expreſſed, with peculiar emphaſis and energy, the extreme aſtoniſhment of the diſciples at this deeply affecting, and, to them, at that period more eſpecially, moſt unwelcome intelligence; for in the next chapter, upon the ſame ſubject being renewed, St. Matthew ſays, ver. 23, ελυπηθησαν σφοδρα, they were *filled with extreme grief* at the news. St. Mark's expreſſion is, if poſſible, ſtill more forcible; for it very ſtrongly expreſſes the extreme perplexity into which they were thrown in conſequence of this prediction, chap. ix. 32, ηγνοουν το ρημα, *they knew not what to make of the matter*. And St. Luke has preciſely the ſame ſentiment, with this very expreſſive and remarkable addition, chap. ix. 45, that it was παρακεκαλυμμενον απ' αυτων, *hid from them*, or ſo wrapt up in darkneſs and myſtery that they could not

not tell what it could mean; i. e. their prejudices concerning *the nature of the Meſſiah's character* plainly prevented them from comprehending how ſuch a prediction could poſſibly be compatible with his being *the Meſſiah*. In the 18th chapter this prediction is again repeated, and St. Luke ſays, ver. 34, *They underſtood none of theſe things, and this matter,* το ρεμα τουτο, *was hid from them; neither knew they the things which were ſpoken*; i. e. they did not comprehend its meaning.

The evidence that the prejudices of our Lord's diſciples were the real cauſes of their extreme aſtoniſhment at his prediction, and of their not underſtanding him, it would be utterly impoſſible for any one who reflects with impartial attention upon the nature and circumſtances of the caſe, to entertain a doubt of, even if our Lord had not himſelf particularly pointed it out; but his reply to St. Peter's exclamation, that no ſuch ſufferings as he had predicted ſhould befal him, renders it abſolutely deciſive. Matt. xvi. 23, *Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence,* or rather, as Biſhop Pearce has tranſlated and paraphraſed it, "thou art an adverſary *unto me*, in throwing difficulties in my way, by urging the motive of ſelf-preſervation againſt my going on with what I am about to accompliſh;" *for thou ſavoureſt not* τα του θεου, *the things of God*, or ſpiritual things; but τα του Ανθρωπου, *the things of men*, or temporal things; moſt evidently alluding, in the former expreſſion, to the ſpiritual

nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom; and in the latter, to their expectation that the Meſſiah was to be *a temporal prince.*

St. Luke has given a very ſtrong, and, as it ſhould ſeem, an unequivocal proof, that *prejudice* was the real cauſe of their not underſtanding our Lord; for, upon the evangeliſt's ſaying, that they underſtood not his prediction concerning his death, that it was *hid from them*, and that they *perceived it not*, he adds, in the following verſe, that *then there aroſe a reaſoning among themſelves which of them ſhould be greateſt*, i. e. who ſhould fill the moſt exalted ſtations in *the kingdom of the Meſſiah.* This I think ſhews, not only that they did not underſtand what our Lord's prediction could poſſibly mean, but that they did not at all imagine that it would take place. A ſimilar contention is alſo recorded by St. Matthew upon another occaſion, chap. xviii. 1. And it appears, from the cloſe of the preceding chapter, to have been occaſioned by our Lord's having wrought a miracle to ſatisfy the demands of the gatherers of the tribute money; for it is ſaid, that *at that time the diſciples came to Jeſus, ſaying, Who is*, or rather, who ſhall be, *the greateſt in the kingdom of heaven*, or of the Meſſiah? It ſeems as if this miracle had fired their imaginations with the proſpect of the ſplendid ſcenes which they ſhould enjoy, when the time came that our Lord ſhould declare himſelf as *the Meſſiah*; having in this inſtance, as well as in many others, ſhewn

that

that he had all nature at his command. All theſe circumſtances muſt, I think, be admitted as authentic evidences of *the truth of the hiſtory*; preſenting to the mind of the reader, at leaſt, as fair a claim to credit, as any hiſtory, ancient or modern, can poſſibly produce. And it may not, perhaps, be improperly added, that they are evidences of that kind, that they will loſe nothing of their weight by any lapſe of time; for if hiſtorical evidence be genuine, it poſſeſſes this very important advantage, that the more cloſely it is ſcrutinized, the more ſatisfactory it will appear, whether it be at the diſtance of one, or of thouſands of years.

It being then indiſputably evident, that the diſciples of our Lord were influenced, chiefly by views of *worldly ambition*, when they ſo ſtrongly remonſtrated with him on account of his prediction of his ſufferings and death, ſaying, *Be it far from thee, Lord; this ſhall not be unto thee*; What line of conduct was it natural for him upon ſuch an occaſion to purſue? What line of conduct did he actually purſue? Why, preciſely that which he had with ſo much firmneſs and intrepidity already purſued, when he gave them their commiſſion to announce *the near approach of the Meſſiah's kingdom*; for as, in that inſtance, he did not ſhun to declare to them, in the ſtrongeſt terms, what ſufferings they would have to undergo, and the neceſſity of a

steady perseverance in the faithful discharge of their duty, whatever might be the consequence; so he doth here. Ver. 24, *If any man will come after me*, i. e. if he will be my disciple, *let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me:* q. d. the sufferings and consequent death which I have predicted as about to come upon me, have given you great offence, as opposing your lofty and ambitious views of worldly prosperity under *the reign of your Messiah*; but I now tell you again, that if you would follow me with fidelity, you must deny yourselves, by giving up those worldly pursuits which have obtained such a powerful ascendence in your minds, and you must take up your cross as I do mine, and must expect to meet with the same, or similar sufferings, in the faithful discharge of your duty. Our Lord then adds, ver. 25, nearly in the words which he had formerly made use of in chap. x. 39, *Whosoever will save his life*, by meanly shrinking from his duty, on account of any such sufferings, *shall lose it. And whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, shall find it*; i. e. he shall find it in a future state, where everlasting life shall be bestowed upon him, as a reward for his fidelity. In the two following verses, the superior advantages of preferring duty to interest, however extensive, are set in the strongest light which it is in the power of language to convey; for, says our Lord, *What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world*

world and loſe his own life? or, *What ſhall a man give in exchange for his life?* No equivalent, in the whole world, can be found for it.[h]

Although it cannot, I think, be denied that our Lord, in the uſe of this language, had an eye to the rewards of a future ſtate, yet it appears to me, that he intended to intimate to his diſciples, that by a faithful adherence to him, they would be preſerved from the awful calamities which were coming

[h] The note of Dr. Whitby upon theſe verſes appears to me to be deſerving of attention. "That the word ψυχη ſhould be here rendered *life*, rather than *ſoul*, in the ſublimer acceptation of the word, ſeems highly probable, from theſe conſiderations: 1ſt, becauſe Chriſt, who came to ſave men's ſouls, could not require of any perſons that they ſhould loſe their ſouls in the worſt ſenſe, but only that they ſhould lay down their lives for his ſake. 2d, Becauſe in the Old Teſtament this phraſe continually occurreth in this ſenſe, where τηρειν την ψυχην, Prov. xiii. 3. xvi. 17. xix. 16. xxiii. 14. σωσαι την ψυχην. Amos ii. 14, 15. is *to preſerve life.*—ρυσαι την ψυχην, Pſalm vi. 4-7. i. 2, is *to deliver us from death.*—απολεσαι την ψυχην, Pſalm xxvi. 9. to loſe life or die. 3. Becauſe it frequently occurs in profane authors in this ſenſe, as when we read in Agathius (L. 3. p. 80.) What if we gain all Perſia, τας δε ψυχας εξημιωμενοι, but loſe our lives? And Achilles, in Homer, (Il. I. v. 401.) ſays, ου γαρ εμοι ψυχης ανταξιον αλλο, Nothing is comparable to my life."

Dr. Campbell ſays, "That our Lord has a principle eye to the loſs of the ſoul, or of eternal life, there can be no doubt. But this ſentiment is couched under a proverb, which, in familiar uſe, concerns only the preſent life. That ψυχη is ſuſceptible of both meanings is beyond a queſtion." See Campbell in loc.

upon the Jewiſh nation. And from an attentive peruſal of the phraſeology made uſe of by our Lord, in deſcribing thoſe calamities, I am ſtrongly inclined to think that he meant to aſſert this, when, in the 27th verſe, he ſays, *For the Son of Man ſhall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels*, or rather with his meſſengers, *and then he ſhall reward every one according to his works.*

The preſent Biſhop of London, having quoted the following paſſage, Matt. xxiv. 30, *They ſhall ſee the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, and he ſhall ſend his angels with a great ſound of a trumpet, &c.* ſays, " Few people, I believe, read theſe verſes without ſuppoſing that they refer entirely to the day of judgment, many of theſe expreſſions being actually applied to that great event in the very next chapter, and in other parts of ſcripture: and indeed ſeveral eminent men and learned commentators are of that opinion, and imagine that our Lord here makes a tranſition from the deſtruction of Jeruſalem to the end of the world, conceiving that ſuch very bold figures of ſpeech could not, with propriety, be applied to the ſubverſion and extinction of any city or ſtate, however great and powerful. But," ſays the biſhop, in my opinion very properly, " the fact is, that theſe very ſame metaphors do frequently in ſcripture denote the deſtruction of nations, cities, and kingdoms [1]."

Again,

[1] See the Biſhop of London's Lectures, p. 157-8. vol. ii.

And

Again, the learned biſhop, upon Matt. xxvi. 64, *Hereafter ye ſhall ſee the Son of Man ſitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven*, ſays, " Sitting at the right hand of power, means ſitting at the right hand of God, to whom the Jews ſometimes give the appellation of *power*; and *coming in the clouds of heaven*, was with the Jews a characteriſtic mark of the Meſſiah. And the whole paſſage relates not to the final judgment, but to the coming of Chriſt to execute vengeance on the Jews in the deſtruction of Jeruſalem by the Romans."[k]

It will hereafter appear, with an evidence bordering upon demonſtration, that both theſe paſſages relate excluſively to *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*. In the mean time, it appears to me highly probable, that when our Lord ſays, in the verſe under conſideration, *The Son of Man ſhall come in the glory of his Father with his angels*, he refers likewiſe to that awful event, eſpecially as it is ſaid in the verſe immediately following, *Verily, I ſay unto you, there are ſome ſtanding here who ſhall not taſte of death till they ſee the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

The only objection to this interpretation of the

And in page 160, he ſays, " Our Lord himſelf explains what is meant by the coming of the Son of Man, in the 27th, 28th, and 37th verſes of this chapter." to wit, of his " coming to execute judgment on the guilty Jews, by the total overthrow of their temple, their city, and their government."

k See the Biſhop of London's Lectures, vol. ii. p. 227-8.

27th verſe of any weight, that I can perceive, is, that the concluding ſentence, *the rendering to every man according to his works*, has been ſuppoſed to be applicable only to *the final judgment*. But this and ſimilar phraſes are frequently uſed in the Old Teſtament to denote the execution of *temporal judgments*, as will appear from the note below.[1]

Mr. Le Clerc, in his note upon the 28th verſe, ſays, "Jeſus Chriſt has repeated this promiſe to St. John, chap. xxi. 22, of his goſpel. This circum-

[1] Jeremiah xvii. 10, *I the Lord ſearch the heart, I try the reins, even to give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.* Chap. xxi. 14, *I will puniſh you according to the fruit of your doings.* Chap. xxxii. 19, *Thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the ſons of men, to give to every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.* The ſame prophet, ſpeaking of the downfal of Babylon, ſays, chap. l. 29, *Recompenſe her according to her work.* Hoſea xii. 2, *The Lord hath a controverſy with Judah, and will puniſh Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompenſe him.*

It appears to me, that all theſe paſſages have a ſpecial relation to *temporal calamities*; and I muſt confeſs I ſee nothing forced or unnatural in applying the verſe in queſtion to *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem.* In my work which is before the public, entitled, The Triumphs of Chriſtianity, &c. I had thought differently of its meaning; nor would I be very poſitive which is the true one. In adopting this, I have thought it the moſt probable of the two; but the reader, who compares them, will form his own judgment which is to be preferred.

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ſtance ſhews clearly that we ought to underſtand the coming of our Lord, of which he here ſpeaks, of what happened during the life of St. John. He ſays, moreover, 1. that it ſhall be *with his angels*; 2. that it ſhall be *to render to every one according to his actions*. We find nothing at that period to which theſe two circumſtances can agree, but the *deſtruction of Jeruſalem*."

I cannot finiſh my obſervations upon the chapter under conſideration, without remarking that the 28th verſe is probably one of thoſe paſſages upon which Mr. Gibbon has founded his declaration that our Lord foretold his *ſecond coming* in the generation in which he lived. But, it muſt be evident beyond diſpute, that the converſation with which it is connected was not about his *ſecond*, but his *firſt coming* as the Meſſiah. And, as our Lord had predicted his ſufferings and death, which the diſciples could not conceive to be compatible with his being *the Meſſiah*, it was indiſpenſably neceſſary that he ſhould fix a period when they ſhould be ſatisfied that he had aſſumed *the character of the Meſſiah*; for, without an aſſurance to this purpoſe, it is not to be imagined that the diſciples could have continued to follow him.

Beſides, it ought to be obſerved, in order to fix the true ſenſe of this verſe, that the original declaration of our Lord, that *the kingdom of heaven*, or of the Meſſiah, *was at hand*, naturally leads the reader

reader to underſtand *his coming in his kingdom*, of *his coming* as the Meſſiah; for it can now, I think, need no proof that the goſpel hiſtory is an hiſtory of the controverſy concerning *the nature of the Meſſiah's character*, and was intended to confirm the truth of his aſſertion, that his kingdom was *near at hand. Verily, I ſay unto you, there are ſome ſtanding here who ſhall not taſte of death till they ſee the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.* [m]

The evangeliſts have not informed us whether this aſſurance of our Lord of *his coming*, as the Meſſiah, had the effect of removing any doubts ariſing from his prediction of his ſufferings and death; but, from the hiſtory of the transfiguration, related in the beginning of the next chapter, it may, I think, fairly be inferred, that though it prevented their deſerting him, yet they were by no means ſatisfied that ſuch a prediction was compatible with *the nature of the Meſſiah's character*. This hiſtory of the transfiguration was evidently calculated to remove this diſſatisfaction, and to give his diſciples a new and diſtinguiſhed proof that he was *the Meſſiah*. That this was the chief deſign of the transfiguration, appears to me evident beyond a doubt, from the concluſion, ver. 5, *While Peter yet ſpake, behold a bright cloud overſhadowed them, and behold a voice came out of the cloud, ſaying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleaſed; hear ye him.*

[m] See Mark viii. 38. Luke ix. 26, 27.

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The preſent Biſhop of London, indeed, ſpeaking of the transfiguration, ſays, " It was a ſymbolical repreſentation of Chriſt's coming in glory to judge the world, and of the rewards which ſhall then be given to the righteous." But there appears to be no ground whatever for ſuch an aſſertion, either in the hiſtory itſelf, or in St. Peter's own account of it, in his ſecond epiſtle. If we conſult the hiſtory, we find it related that *his face did ſhine as the ſun*, that *his raiment was white as the light*, that *Moſes and Elias appeared and converſed with him*, and that *a bright cloud overſhadowed them*; but not a word is there about Chriſt's coming in glory to judge the world, nor any thing at all like it[n]."

If, from the original tranſaction, we turn to St. Peter's account, we ſhall be ſtill more fully convinced that he has no alluſion to any thing of the kind, any more than the evangeliſt. *We have not*, he ſays, *followed cunningly deviſed fables when we made known to you*, την δυναμιν, *the* miraculous *power and coming of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*, as the Meſſiah, *but were eye-witneſſes of his majeſty; for he received from God the Father, honour and glory*; when there came ſuch a voice to him from the excellent glory, *This is my beloved ſon in whom I am well pleaſed.*

[n] St. Luke particularly mentions, that the converſation turned upon the deceaſe that he ſhould accompliſh at Jeruſalem; but I know not upon what authority the Biſhop ſays that a general reſurrection and a day of retribution are repreſented in the transfiguration. See his Lectures, vol. ii. p. 14.

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And this voice, which came from heaven, we heard when we were with him in the holy mount. St. Peter appears to have overlooked all the other circumſtances attending the transfiguration, and confines himſelf entirely to that which was the great object of it, viz. the declaration from heaven that he was *the beloved Son of God* °.

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° The learned Biſhop plainly underſtands *the coming of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*, in the 16th verſe, of *his coming to judge the world at the laſt day*; but the whole of the apoſtle's reaſoning compels us to underſtand it of *his coming* as the Meſſiah, and the ſubſequent part of the chapter is, in my humble opinion, a demonſtrative proof that this, and this only, was his meaning, though I think it has not been accurately underſtood, from not attending to our Lord's having connected *his coming* as the Meſſiah with *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*. Ver. 19, *We have*, ſays the apoſtle, *τον προφητικον λογον, the prophetic word* concerning his coming, *βεβαιοτερον, more confirmed*; but how more confirmed? Why, by the ſigns which are now appearing of *the near approach of the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, whereunto*, ſays the apoſtle, *ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that ſhineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and that which bringeth the full blaze of light, φωσφορος, ſhall ariſe to illuminate your hearts*, and in the fulleſt manner convince you that *we have not followed cunningly deviſed fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt. Knowing this firſt*, as the foundation of our confidence in the accompliſhment of his prediction of the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, *that no prophecy is of private interpretation*; or, rather, of private ſuggeſtion, (ſee the Churchman's Magazine, vol. ii. p. 12), or of human invention; *for prophecy came not, ποτε, formerly by the will*, or at the pleaſure, *of men*; *but holy*

The learned Biſhop having, as I conceive, without any authority from the hiſtory of the transfiguration, or from St. Peter's account of it, introduced our Lord's reſurrection and exaltation, and a future day of retribution, is much perplexed to aſſign a ſufficient reaſon why the injunction of ſecrecy till after his reſurrection ſhould have been given. "Becauſe," ſays the Biſhop, "he had already foretold his reſurrection to his diſciples, and he alſo apprized them before his death of his coming in glory to judge the world. It does not therefore appear how the publication of the viſion on the mount could have been attended with any other conſequence than that of *confirming* what Jeſus had already made known. But if we ſuppoſe that *one* purpoſe of the transfiguration was to typify the abolition of the ceremonial law and the eſtabliſhment of the evangelical, a plain

holy men of God ſpake as they were moved by the Holy Ghoſt, and conſequently were entitled to the fulleſt credit.

The whole of this argument appears to me to be peculiarly forcible and convincing, and to harmonize moſt exactly with the goſpel hiſtory, and particularly with our Lord's manner of connecting the full proof of his coming as the Meſſiah with *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*. *As the days of Noah were, ſo ſhall* the true nature of *the coming of the Son of Man be*. And as our Lord had particularly directed his diſciples *to watch* for this awful event, the apoſtle very properly ſays, of ſome ſigns of its near approach which were then appearing, *whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as to a light ſhining in a dark place*, which will ſoon burſt out in full ſplendor.

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reaſon preſents itſelf for this command of keeping it for ſome time private."

But, with all due ſubmiſſion to the learned Biſhop, is not this ſuppoſition altogether as unfounded in the hiſtory of the transfiguration as the other? Is there one word ſaid that the transfiguration was to typify the abolition of the ceremonial law? I muſt confeſs my ſagacity is not equal to the diſcovering any ſuch typification, and I am ſure it is not neceſſary, in order to afford *a plain reaſon* for our Lord's charging his diſciples *to tell the viſion to no man till the Son of man was riſen from the dead.* In the preceding chapter, ver. 20, he *had charged his diſciples that they ſhould tell no man that he was the Chriſt*, or the Meſſiah, and the principal object of the transfiguration being to give them a divine atteſtation of his being *the beloved Son of God*, the charge was again repeated, and for the ſame reaſon; for it was not yet proper that he ſhould publicly be declared to be *the Meſſiah.* And this, it muſt be obſerved, perfectly harmonizes with the general tenor of the goſpel hiſtory, as an hiſtory of the controverſy between our Lord and the Jews concerning *the true nature of the Meſſiah's character.*

The reader's attention is now requeſted to the 24th chapter of Matthew, as affording ſtill clearer evidence that the goſpel hiſtory is an hiſtory of this controverſy. This chapter begins with our Lord's prediction of *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, and it is thus introduced. Ver. 1, *And Jeſus went out and*

departed from the temple, and his disciples came to him to shew him the buildings of the temple. When they had taken a survey of this magnificent pile of buildings, which, for art and beauty, was esteemed the wonder of the world, our Lord said to them, ου βλεπετε παντα ταυτα; *See ye not all these things*, or look not on all these things with excessive admiration. *Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down.*

The astonishment which this awful prediction produced upon the minds of the disciples, who still continued to entertain the most splendid ideas of the prosperity of their nation under the reign of their Messiah, may easily be conceived; and it is represented in a very natural and lively manner, by the questions which, upon this occasion, they immediately put to him. So contrary was this prediction to every idea which, *as Jews*, they had been accustomed to entertain, that they could not help exclaiming, *When shall these things be?* and if they must be, for that is evidently the ellipsis to be supplied, *What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world*, or age[p]?

[p] "By the end of the world," says the present Bishop of London, "is to be understood, not the final consummation of all things here below, but the end of *that age*, the end of the Jewish state and polity; the subversion of their city, temple, and government." See his Lectures, vol. ii. p. 139, 140. See also the Appendix to my Key, No. I.

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That by our Lord's coming, the disciples here meant *his coming*, not as *the judge of the world*, but as *the Messiah*, is, I think, demonstrably evident; not only from the general tenor of the history, and from their acknowledged expectations of *his coming* as the Messiah, still entertained by them, but from his immediately proceeding, in so particular a manner, to caution them against false Christs and false prophets who should come in his name, or with his pretensions to *the character of the Messiah*, and by his again and again, in the course of the awful narrative, repeating the same caution. Ver. 4, *Take heed that no man deceive you; for many shall come in my name, saying, I am* ὁ χριστος, *the Christ*, or the Messiah, *and shall deceive many*. And again, ver. 23, *Then*, i. e. when the things he had just been describing are coming to pass, *if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is* ὁ χριστος, *the Christ*, or the Messiah, *or there, believe him not; for there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and they shall shew great signs and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive even the very elect*. And that these cautions, thus again and again repeated, might make the deepest impression upon their minds, our Lord makes this very impressive and remarkable addition, ver. 25, 26, *Behold I have told you before; wherefore if they*, viz. the false prophets, *shall say unto you, Behold he*, the Messiah, *is in the desert, go not forth* after him; *behold he is in the secret chambers*, waiting for a fit opportunity of declaring

declaring himſelf as the Meſſiah, *believe them not.* And that they might be completely upon their guard againſt their deceptive arts, he ſtill further tells them, that *the nature and manner of his coming* would be ſo conſpicuous, that an attentive and diſcerning obſerver could not poſſibly miſtake it. Ver. 27, *For as the lightning cometh out of the eaſt, and ſhineth even unto the weſt; ſo ſhall alſo* the true nature and manner of *the coming of the Son of Man,* the Meſſiah, for perſpicuity, *be.*

But, to prevent this language from being miſunderſtood, or applied to any other event than to the infliction of puniſhment on the Jews, in *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem,* our Lord, in a ſubſequent part of the chapter, very fully explains what he meant by the phraſe, *the coming of the Son of Man.* Ver. 37, *As the days of Noah* were, which unqueſtionably were days of great TEMPORAL VENGEANCE, *ſo,* he ſays, *ſhall alſo* the nature of *the coming of the Son of Man be.* And, yet further to exemplify *the nature of his coming,* and to render his meaning perfect, clear, and diſtinct, he applies the caſe of Noah to that of the Jews. Ver. 38-9, *For as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not* their danger *till the flood came and took them all away; ſo ſhall alſo* the true nature of *the coming of the Son of Man be,* in oppoſition to the manner in which the Jews expected him to come

as *a temporal prince*, to raiſe them to the moſt diſtinguiſhed pre-eminence as *the lords of the world.*

The meaning of the 27th verſe being thus fully aſcertained by the uſe of the ſame phraſe in the 37th and 39th verſes, our Lord goes on to explain, by a proverbial expreſſion, by what means this deſtruction ſhould be effected. Ver. 28, *For wherefoever the carcaſe is, there will the eagles*, the Roman army, whoſe ſtandard is the eagle, *be gathered together.* The Biſhop of London, upon this verſe, ſays, " By the carcaſe is meant the Jewiſh nation, which was morally and judicially dead; and the inſtruments of divine vengeance, that is, the Roman armies, whoſe ſtandards were eagles, would be collected together to devour their prey."

In the verſe immediately following, the effects of this awful cataſtrophe are deſcribed in ſuch ſtrong language, as to have led many commentators to ſuppoſe that it refers entirely to *the day of judgment*, conceiving, to uſe the Biſhop of London's own expreſſion, that ſuch very bold figures could not, with propriety, be applied to the ſubverſion and extinction of any city or ſtate, however great and powerful. " But the fact," the Biſhop very properly obſerves, " is, that theſe very ſame metaphors," uſed in this verſe, " do frequently in ſcripture denote the deſtruction of nations, cities, and kingdoms. Thus Iſaiah, ſpeaking of the deſtruction of Babylon, ſays, *Behold the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the*

the land deſolate; and he ſhall deſtroy the ſinners thereof out of it: For the ſtars of heaven and the conſtellations thereof ſhall not give their light; the ſun ſhall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon ſhall not cauſe her light to ſhine. (Iſa. xiii. 9.) And, in almoſt the ſame terms, he deſcribes the puniſhment of the Idumeans, (ch. xxxiv. 34.) and of Sennacherib and his people, (ch. li. 6.) Ezekiel ſpeaks in the ſame manner of Egypt, (ch. xxxii. 7, 8.); and Daniel of the ſlaughter of the Jews, (ch. viii. 10.); and what is ſtill more to the point, the prophet Joel deſcribes this very deſtruction of Jeruſalem in terms very ſimilar to thoſe of Chriſt. (Ch. ii. 30, 31.) *I will ſhew wonders in the heavens; and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of ſmoke. The ſun ſhall be turned into darkneſs, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord ſhall come.*"

"It is evident then," adds the Biſhop, "that the phraſes here made uſe of, of the ſun being darkened, and the moon not giving her light, and the ſtars falling from heaven, and the powers of heaven being ſhaken, are figures meant to expreſs the fall of cities, kingdoms, and nations; and the origin of this ſort of language is well illuſtrated by a late very learned prelate (Biſhop Warburton), who tells us, that in ancient hieroglyphic writing, the ſun, moon, and ſtars, were uſed to repreſent ſtates and empires, kings, queens, and nobility; their eclipſe or extinction denoted temporary diſ-

aſters, or entire overthrow, &c. So the prophets in like manner call kings and empires by the names of the heavenly luminaries. Stars falling from the firmament are employed to denote the deſtruction of the nobility and other great men; inſomuch, that in reality the prophetic ſtyle ſeems to be *a ſpeaking hieroglyphic.*" See the 19th Lecture p. 157, 158-9 [q].

The 30th verſe appears to be a direct anſwer to the queſtion of the diſciples—*What ſhall be the ſign of thy coming? Then*, ſays our Lord, *ſhall appear the ſign of the Son of Man in heaven, and then ſhall all the tribes of the earth*, or rather of the land, *mourn, and they ſhall ſee the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, and he ſhall ſend his angels*, or rather his meſſengers, *with the great ſound of a trumpet, and they ſhall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the one end of heaven to the other.*

The prophet Daniel, from whom the expreſſion, the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds of heaven, ſeems to be taken, ſays, ch. vii. 13, *I ſaw*

[q] When I publiſhed my Triumphs of Chriſtianity over Infidelity in 1802, my inveſtigation of this part of the ſubject had been printed off before I had ſeen the Biſhop's Lectures. But the reader who will refer to it, may ſee numerous quotations from the Old Teſtament illuſtrative of our Lord's ſtyle; and what is remarkable, this very quotation from Biſhop Warburton at full length. The ſame view of the ſubject I had given ſo far back as the year 1787, in a pamphlet entitled, An Attempt to Illuſtrate various Paſſages of Scripture.

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n the night viſions, and behold one like the, or like a, *Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people and nations and languages ſhould ſerve him.* When therefore the prophet ſays, that *the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven*, he appears to me to have intended to repreſent *the nature and manner of his coming* in the execution of vengeance, agreeably to our Lord's ſubſequent explanation of it, viz. that it ſhould be *as in the days of Noah*, when the people were engaged in all the occupations of human life, little thinking of, or expecting the flood which was about to overwhelm them. It muſt likewiſe be obſerved, that as clouds produce *darkneſs*, and not unfrequently *ſtorms and tempeſts* in the natural world, which are ſometimes attended with the moſt tremendous deſolation; the expreſſion became a very convenient, and at the ſame time a very ſignificant ſymbol to denote great national calamities, and the ruin of ſtates and empires.

When therefore our Lord made uſe of this expreſſion, in the cloſeſt connection with his prediction of *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, and in connection too with the phraſe, *the coming of the Son of Man*, ſo often uſed in this very chapter, what better evidence can poſſibly be required, that by *the coming of the Son of Man in* CLOUDS, or in *the clouds of heaven*, was meant the nature and manner of his coming as the Meſſiah, and that by *the deſtruction*

of Jeruſalem it would fully appear how much the Jews had been miſtaken when they ſuppoſed that he was to be *a temporal prince*, to conduct them to conqueſt and to empire [r].

The only expreſſion, in theſe verſes, which ſeem now to require explanation, is our Lord's *ſending his angels to gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.* "Theſe words," the Biſhop of London ſays, "though they ſeem as if they could belong to no other ſubject than the laſt day, yet moſt aſſuredly relate principally to the great object of this prophecy, *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*; after which dreadful event we are here told, that Chriſt will ſend forth his angels; that is,

[r] The Biſhop of London, ſpeaking of the 30th verſe, ſays, "Thoſe awful words then ſhall appear, the ſign of the Son of Man in heaven; and then ſhall the tribes of the earth mourn, and they ſhall ſee the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven; and then ſhall all the tribes of the land mourn, and they ſhall ſee the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; ſeem applicable ſolely to the laſt advent of Chriſt to judge the world; and yet it is certain, that in their primary ſignification they refer to the manifeſtation of Chriſt's power and glory, in coming to execute judgment on the guilty Jews, by the total overthrow of their temple, their city, and their government; for ſo our Lord himſelf explains what is meant by *the coming of the Son of Man*, in the 27th, 28th, and 37th, verſes of this chapter. And when the prophet Daniel is predicting this very appearance of Chriſt to puniſh the Jews, he deſcribes him as *coming in the clouds of heaven, and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom.*" See the Biſhop's 19th Lecture, p. 160.

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his meſſengers, or miniſters (for ſo that word ſtrictly ſignifies), to preach his goſpel to all the world; which preaching is called, by the prophets, lifting up the voice like a trumpet; and they ſhall gather together his elect (that is, ſhall collect diſciples and converts to the faith) from the four winds, from the four quarters of the earth, or, as St. Luke expreſſes it, from the eaſt and from the weſt, and from the north and from the ſouth."

But that it might not be poſſible to miſtake our Lord's meaning, he appears to have taken uncommon pains to ſhew that he ſpake *excluſively* of what was ſoon to take place; for, in the 32d verſe, in anſwer to the queſtion of the diſciples, *When ſhall theſe things be?* he ſays, *Now learn a parable*, or inſtruction, *from the fig-tree: When its branch is yet tender and putteth forth leaves, ye know that ſummer is nigh; ſo likewiſe ye, when ye ſhall ſee all theſe things*, the things which he had juſt been deſcribing, *know that it*, or, as St. Luke more fully expreſſes himſelf, *that the kingdom of God*[s] *is near, even at the doors.*

[s] Mr. Mede, though in general remarkable for his modeſty as a writer, has been very poſitive that the phraſe, *the kingdom of God*, has here a very different meaning from that commonly uſed in the goſpel hiſtory. "I deny not," he ſays, but firmly believe that Chriſt's kingdom took place at his *firſt coming*; but I utterly deny that to be the kingdom our Saviour propheſies of Luke xxi. 31, and anſwerably in the other goſpels." And Dr. Edwards, in his note referring to this very paſſage of

doors. This language, if it has any meaning in it, is ſtrongly expreſſive of *contiguity*, and cannot, I will venture to affirm, without extreme violence, not only to the connection and occaſion of the diſcourſe, but, what is more to the purpoſe, to the whole tenor of the goſpel hiſtory, be underſtood of any other event than of the very near approach of *the kingdom of the Meſſiah*, which our Lord had ori-

St. Luke, quotes Dr. Sykes as very candidly allowing, that by *the kingdom of God*, we are here to underſtand its glorious ſtate and perfection in a future world. And what is very remarkable, Dr. Edwards has, with equal confidence with Mr. Mede, aſſerted that any other interpretation would indeed be utterly groundleſs. But upon what grounds have theſe learned men made theſe bold and confident aſſertions? It is not to be denied that the language of the parable very ſtrongly expreſſes that this kingdom, whatever it was, was very near *at hand*. Nor do I think it can be denied, with any appearance of reaſon, that by the kingdom of God, was meant the kingdom of the Meſſiah declared by our Lord in his original language to be *at hand*; or, if any one is hardy enough to deny this, the proofs which have been adduced that the queſtion of the diſciples, *What ſhall be the ſign of thy coming?* relates to *the coming of the Meſſiah*, will oblige him to retract his opinion. Beſides, can it be denied, without denying the moſt direct and poſitive evidence, without contradicting the whole tenor of the goſpel hiſtory, that *the kingdom of God*, or of the Meſſiah, was expected, and ſtill continued to be expected, both by the diſciples of Jeſus and by the whole Jewiſh nation? And where could he have aſſerted *its near approach* ſo naturally and ſo properly as when he had been annihilating, by his predic-tion of *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, the very foundation of all their hopes of his being *a temporal prince*!

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ginally declared to be *at hand*. Indeed it appears to me utterly impoſſible that the diſciples of our Lord could have underſtood him in any other ſenſe.

But, as if this minute preciſion was not ſufficiently clear to expreſs his full meaning, our Lord, in the following verſe, goes on and ſays, in terms of the greateſt ſolemnity and ſtrength of language, ver. 34, *Verily, I ſay unto you, this generation ſhall not paſs away till all theſe things be fulfilled.* And to give all poſſible weight to this aſſurance, he immediately adds, in the 35th verſe, *Heaven and earth ſhall paſs away, but my words ſhall not paſs away.* See alſo Mark xiii. 28, &c. and Luke xxi. 29; in both which evangeliſts the connection and the language are preciſely the ſame.

The late Biſhop Newton was ſo ſtrongly impreſſed with the emphaſis and energy of this language, that he thus forcibly expreſſes himſelf upon it. "It is to me a wonder how any man can refer part of the foregoing diſcourſe to the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, and part to the end of the world, or any other diſtant event, when it is ſaid ſo poſitively in the concluſion, *All theſe things ſhall be fulfilled in this generation* [t]. It ſeemeth as if our Saviour had been aware of ſome ſuch miſapplication of his words, by adding yet greater force and emphaſis to

[t] For the meaning of the term *generation*, ſee my former publication, entitled, The Triumphs of Chriſtianity over Infidelity, in the Appendix, No. II.

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his affirmation, ver. 35, *Heaven and earth ſhall paſs away, but my words ſhall not paſs away.* And yet this very prelate, with an inconſiſtency that is truly aſtoniſhing, ſays, almoſt immediately afterwards, that "ſome of theſe paſſages, particularly verſes 29, 30, and 31, in a figurative ſenſe, may be underſtood of *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*; but that in their literal ſenſe, they can be meant only of *the end of the world!*"

With a like ſtrength of language with Biſhop Newton, Dr. Macknight has obſerved, that "our Lord has forbidden us to underſtand any part of this prophecy, *primarily* (why primarily?) of the deſtruction of the world; having connected all its parts in ſuch a manner, that the things foretold, whatever they are, muſt have happened in cloſe ſucceſſion. For any interpreter to correct Chriſt's language here, and to ſay that in the 29th verſe, *immediately after*, ſignifies *two or three thouſand years after*; and that in the 34th verſe, *all theſe things*, ſignifies only *ſome of them*, is a liberty which cannot ſafely be taken with his words." See Macknight in loc.

But theſe learned men are now no more, and if their opinion had died with them, it would have been cruelty to have taken any notice of it now that they are incapable of defending themſelves; but when ſuch a man as the preſent Biſhop of London becomes the profeſſed advocate for this opinion, the cauſe of truth demands that it ſhould be

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expoſed and confuted, as highly injurious to the perſpicuity of the ſacred writings. If it is defenſible, his abilities are amply ſufficient for its ſupport; but if not, I truſt no offence can reaſonably be taken that I have ventured to expreſs my entire diſapprobation of it. "Our Saviour," the Biſhop ſays, "in the chapter before us, ſeems to hold out *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, which is his principal object, as a type of *the diſſolution of the world*, which is the under part of the repreſentation. By thus judiciouſly mingling together theſe two important cataſtrophes, he gives at the ſame time (as he does in many other inſtances) a moſt intereſting admonition to his immediate hearers, the Jews, and a moſt awful leſſon to all his future diſciples; and the benefit of his predictions, inſtead of being confined to one occaſion, or to one people, is by this admirable management extended to every ſubſequent period of time, and to the whole Chriſtian world [u]."

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[u] It has been excellently well obſerved by Dr. Benſon, "that we juſtly condemn the anſwers of the heathen oracles as riddles, dark, obſcure, vague, and indeterminate; capable of being turned many ways, without knowing certainly which ſenſe was intended, or in what way they are to be underſtood. But divine prophecies ſhould be intelligible, and have one determinate meaning, that it may be known when and how they are accompliſhed. We admire it as an excellence in Homer, and other celebrated writers of antiquity, that their meaning

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It is of importance to be obſerved, that the learned Biſhop attaches to this general remark, as he terms it, the greateſt conſequence; for he expreſsly ſays, it is "a ſort of key to the whole prophecy, and will afford an eaſy ſolution to ſeveral difficulties that occur in it." But it is peculiarly unfortunate that ſo zealous an advocate for types, and double meanings, and ſecondary ſignifications, ſhould, in another part of his Lectures, have expreſſed his diſapprobation of them in the interpretation of ſcripture; for he expreſsly ſays, that "it is a rule admitted and eſtabliſhed by the beſt and moſt judicious interpreters, that in explaining the ſacred writings, we ought never, without the moſt apparent and moſt indiſpenſable neceſſity, allow ourſelves the liberty of departing from the plain, obvious, and literal meaning of the words." But where, in the preſent caſe, is the neceſſity of departing from the plain, obvious, and literal meaning of the words? The learned Biſhop indeed ſays, "the prophecy was probably intended by Jeſus as a type and emblem of the diſſolution of the world itſelf." But from whence does this probability ariſe? Not ſurely from the highly figura-

is expreſſed clearly: and may we not expect, when God ſpeaks to men, that his meaning ſhould be expreſſed in as clear and determinate a manner." See Benſon's Eſſay on the Unity of the Senſe of Scripture, prefixed to the ſecond volume of his Paraphraſe. See alſo the Biſhop of Landaff's Tracts, in which this Eſſay is introduced.

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tive language of the 29th and following verſes; for he ſays, in the moſt expreſs terms, that " the fact is, that theſe very ſame metaphors do frequently in ſcripture denote the deſtruction of nations, cities, and kingdoms."

To the Biſhop's obſervation, " that by judiciouſly mingling together theſe two important cataſtrophes, the benefit of his predictions, inſtead of being confined to one occaſion, or to one people, is by this admirable management extended to every ſubſequent period of time, and to the whole Chriſtian world," it may, I think, be fairly replied, that our Lord has peremptorily diſclaimed any ſuch management, by confining, in as ſtrong language as can be made uſe of, the whole of his prediction to that generation. And what is remarkable enough, we have the Biſhop's own teſtimony, though interlarded with the word *principally*, that it is ſo confined; for, ſpeaking of the 35th verſe, he ſays, " This by the way is an unanſwerable proof, that every thing our Lord had been ſaying in the preceding part of the chapter, related principally, not to *the day of Judgment*, or to any other very remote event, but to *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, which did in reality happen before that generation had paſſed away."

But to proceed in the examination of the remainder of the chapter under conſideration. Our Lord having, as has been obſerved, moſt energetically

tically aſſerted, that the events which he had, in ſo particular a manner, been deſcribing, would take place in that generation, goes on in the 36th verſe and ſays, *Of that day and hour*, or ſeaſon when theſe things ſhould happen, *knoweth no man, no, not the angels, but my father only*; " that is," ſays the Biſhop of London, " although the time when Jeruſalem is to be deſtroyed, is, as I have told you, fixed *generally* to this generation, yet the *preciſe day and hour* of that event is not known to men or angels, but to God only." And he adds, that " this verſe cannot, without violence to the words, be applied to the final advent of Chriſt " In the following verſes, our Lord further illuſtrates his meaning, by an alluſion to the well-known hiſtory of Noah, which is ſo clear as not to be miſtaken. The Biſhop of London, having quoted theſe verſes, ſays, in his peculiarly excellent manner, " When the deſolation ſhall come upon the city and temple of Jeruſalem, the inhabitants would be as thoughtleſs and unconcerned, and as unprepared for it, as the antediluvians were for the flood in the days of Noah. But as ſome (more particularly the Chriſtians) will be more watchful, and in a better ſtate of mind than others, the providence of God will make a diſtinction between his faithful and his diſobedient ſervants, and will protect and preſerve the former, but leave the latter to be taken or deſtroyed by their enemies; although they may both be in the

the ſame ſituation of life, may be engaged in the ſame occupations, and may appear to the world to be in every reſpect in ſimilar circumſtances."

" Here," ſays the Biſhop, " ends the prophetical part of our Lord's diſcourſe; what follows is altogether exhortatory. It may be called the moral of the prophecy, and is a practical application of it, not only to his immediate hearers, but to his diſciples in all future ages; for this concluding admonition moſt certainly alludes no leſs to *the final judgment* than to *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, and applies with at leaſt equal force to both."

I perfectly agree with the learned Biſhop, that it may be called the moral of the prophecy, and is a practical application of it; but further than this I cannot go with him, for it appears to me demonſtrable that this practical application of the moral of the prophecy relates to a watchfulneſs, not for *the day of judgment*, but for the completion of our Lord's prediction. In the former part of this prediction he had particularly directed their attention to it. Ver. 25, *Behold I have told you before.* And in the 42d verſe, he ſays, *Watch therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.* And that the remainder of the chapter has an excluſive reference to this watchfulneſs for *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, is extremely evident from the following chapter, which is an undoubted continuation of the ſame ſubject; for the concluſion of the firſt parable contained in it, is thus expreſſed: ver. 13, *Watch therefore;*

therefore; for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh. Let the reader compare this language with that in the 36th and 42d verſes of the preceding chapter, and he will ſoon be convinced that it has an excluſive relation to the ſame ſubject.

Such appears to me to be the genuine meaning of the whole of the 24th of Matthew, and the parallel chapters of Mark and Luke, unincumbered by typical meanings and double ſenſes, which not only diveſt them of their ſimplicity, and render them in a great meaſure unintelligible, but bring great diſcredit upon the Chriſtian records[x]. It has, I think, been moſt judiciouſly obſerved by Mr. Richards in his excellent Bampton Lectures, that "the Goſpel diſpenſation was *final.* It prepared not the way, nor looked forward to any other. It was not neceſſary therefore to have recourſe to typical ceremonies or ſecondary ſenſes, either in the inſtitutions, or in the predictions delivered by its holy founder, or his inſpired Apoſtles." Mr. Richards has added that, conſequently no traces of them will be found in the New Teſtament, if we except the remarkable inſtance of a double meaning in the prophecy of our Lord, in which he intermingles *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem* with the general judg-

[x] I have compreſſed my examination of the 24th of Matthew in as ſmall a compaſs as I conveniently could; but if the reader is deſirous of ſeeing it more amply diſcuſſed, I beg leave to refer him to my late work, entitled, *The Triumphs of Chriſtianity over Infidelity,* from p. 80 to 131.

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ment." But how far this will be deemed an exception, the reader is now fully able to determine: for my own part, I do not hesitate to say, that I cannot consider this as an exception. In supporting this opinion I have ventured to controvert that of the Bishop of London, and I trust it will be found that I have been neither uncandid nor for a moment forgetful of the respect which is due to so distinguished a character.

I cannot however conclude my observations upon this subject without quoting, with the warmest approbation, the remark of Dr. Benson in what manner the sacred writings should be studied. "It appears to me, he says, that a critical interpreter of holy scripture should set out with this, as a first principle, viz. that no text of scripture has more than one meaning. That one true sense, he should endeavour to find out, as he would find out the sense of *Homer* or any other ancient writer. When he has found out that sense, he ought to acquiesce in it, and so ought his readers too, unless, by the just rules of interpretation, they can shew that he has mistaken the passage, and that another is the one, just, true critical sense of the place."

Before I proceed in the order of St. Matthew's narration, I must beg leave to take some notice of a conversation which passed between our Lord and the Jews concerning the establishment of *the kingdom of the Messiah*, mentioned by St. Luke, ch. xvii. 20, &c. not only because it has an evident relation

to his controverſy with them, but becauſe it, as evidently, is parallel to the 24th of Matthew, and at the ſame time, contains ſome expreſſions which have, very improperly, been applied to *the day of judgment.* The occaſion of this converſation is thus ſtated: *And when he was demanded of the Phariſees when the kingdom of God ſhould come* [y], *he anſwered and ſaid, The kingdom of God cometh not with obſervation,* i. e. as Biſhop Pearce has, very properly, explained it, The kingdom of the Meſſiah, or of Chriſt, is not to be of that kind that ye expect, and which has outward ſhew and pomp to make it obſervable; *neither ſhall they ſay, Lo here or lo there, for behold the kingdom of God is among you,* though you pretend to ſee none of the ſigns of its approach.

I have, in my Triumphs of Chriſtianity over Infidelity, compared this chapter with the 24th

[y] This is one of thoſe paſſages which, Mr. Mede ſays, relates to the kingdom of a thouſand years, which the Apocalypſe includes between the beginning and conſummation of the great judgment. But if the meaning of the queſtion of the Phariſees is to be determined by the known and acknowledged ſentiments which they at that period unqueſtionably entertained concerning *the nature of the Meſſiah's character,* there cannot poſſibly exiſt a ſhadow of a doubt that this great man was miſtaken, and that the Phariſees, when they put this queſtion, had no notion but of the temporal eſtabliſhment of the kingdom of the Meſſiah in their own time. The ſubſequent part of the chapter is of itſelf a ſufficient proof of this.

chapter

chapter of St. Matthew, and ſhall not repeat any thing I have there ſaid, farther than to ſay, that when our Lord aſſerts, that the Jews would *deſire to ſee one of the days of the Son of Man, and ſhould not ſee it,* he probably meant that they would never ſee any ſuch days of the Son of Man as they had figured to themſelves, in the enjoyment of great national proſperity under the temporal reign of their Meſſiah. As a proof that this was his meaning, he ſays there were thoſe who would ſay to them, *See here or ſee there* he is, ready to make his appearance and to aſſume the character of the Meſſiah; but, ſays our Lord, *go not after them nor follow them; for as the lightning that lightneth out of the one part under heaven ſhineth unto the other part under heaven, ſo ſhall alſo the Son of Man be in his day;* or, as St. Matthew explains it, *ſo ſhall alſo* the true nature of *the coming of the Son of Man,* the Meſſiah, for perſpicuity *be.* In the 26th and following verſes, our Lord, as in St. Matthew's narration, refers them to the caſe of Noah, to which St. Luke adds that of Lot; and then ſays, the more fully to explain his meaning, v. 30, *Even thus ſhall it be when* the true nature of the coming of *the Son of Man,* the Meſſiah, *is revealed*[z].

As the remainder of this chapter requires no ex-

[z] This paſſage very happily explains the Apoſtle Peter's meaning in his 1ſt Epiſtle, Ch. i. 5. See my Triumphs of Chriſtianity.

planation, I shall proceed immediately to the consideration of the 26th chapter of St. Matthew, which contains the last, the most important, and the most decisive proof, that the Gospel history is an history of the great controversy between our Lord and the Jews concerning *the true nature of the Messiah's character*. In this chapter is detailed the history of the arraignment, trial, and condemnation of our Lord, as a notorious malefactor and impostor, for assuming *the character of the Messiah*. And as in this case it was absolutely necessary, according to the usual forms in judicial proceedings, to prove the fact that our Lord had laid claim to that character, the manner in which the Jewish rulers conducted themselves, in order to prove this fact, is particularly deserving of the reader's attention. The historian, in the 59th and following verses, tells us, that *the chief priests and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus to put him to death, but found none; yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none* to establish the fact, that he had ever, throughout his whole ministry, assumed *the character of the Messiah*. How admirably is the authenticity of the preceding history established by this narration! And how strongly does it demonstrate the great wisdom of our Lord's conduct, in not publicly declaring that he was *the Messiah*, and in forbidding his disciples, when he had privately acknowledged to them that he was *the Messiah*, to make

make him known under that character, and in taking, at the ſame time, the moſt effectual meaſures to enforce his injunction, by foretelling his own ſufferings and death! In how ſtrong a point of view likewiſe does it ſhow *the extreme propriety*, and even the abſolute neceſſity, of the language which he did adopt, though it has, through ignorance, been moulded into a moſt formidable objection to the truth and integrity of our Lord's character! For it appears, from the hiſtory of our Lord's trial, that notwithſtanding the wicked artifices of the Jewiſh rulers, they were, at length, conſtrained to apply to our Lord himſelf, that, if poſſible, they might extort from him a confeſſion that he had claimed *the character of the Meſſiah*; though moſt certainly in direct violation of a fundamental maxim in judicial proceedings, that a man ſhould not be obliged to convict himſelf.

When the witneſſes who appeared againſt him had delivered their evidence, ſuch as it was, the high prieſt addreſſed our Lord, and aſked him what he had to ſay in his defence againſt their accuſation. V. 62. *Anſwereſt thou nothing? What is it which theſe witneſs againſt thee?* But Jeſus, according to the expreſſive language of the Evangeliſt, *held his peace.* The high prieſt then, conſcious of the deficiency of the evidence which had been given againſt him, and finding that our Lord made no reply to his queſtions, ſaid to him again,

I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us whether thou be the Chriſt, or the Meſſiah, *the Son of God.*

Although our Lord well knew the fatal conſequences to himſelf of an acknowledgement that he was *the Meſſiah*, yet, being thus ſolemnly adjured as to *the nature of his character*, he, with a dignity ſuitable to that high character, replied, *Thou haſt ſaid*; *i. e.* thou haſt ſaid the truth; or, as St. Mark has it, *I am.* I do acknowledge that I am the Meſſiah, and, as a proof that I actually do ſuſtain that character, I ſay unto you απ' αρτι; or, as St. Luke has it, απο του νυν, *from the preſent time*, as both theſe phraſes literally ſignify, *ſhall ye ſee the Son of Man*, the Meſſiah, *ſitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*

If now there be any connection between the queſtion of the Jewiſh high prieſt and the reply which our Lord made to it, if his meaning can be collected from the ſituation and circumſtances of things at the time of his ſpeaking, it could be no other than this, that though he was in the hands of his enemies, about to be degraded, reviled, and condemned as *a notorious malefactor and impoſtor*, for aſſuming *the character of the Meſſiah*, yet that the claim which he had now, in the moſt public manner, made to that character was juſtly founded; and as a proof that it was ſo, and that the Jews had totally miſtaken its *true nature*, in ſuppoſing that he was to be *a temporal prince* to raiſe them to the moſt diſtinguiſhed

tinguiſhed pre-eminence as *the lords of the world*, they ſhould *ſee the Son of Man ſitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*

Such a declaration as this muſt have been a very ſevere and cutting one to them, as it ſtruck at the root of all their deepeſt prejudices and their deareſt hopes and expectations. It was as if he had ſaid; you have been looking and longing with the utmoſt ardour and impatience for a perſon who ſhould aſſume the *character of your Meſſiah*, to raiſe you to the higheſt pitch of worldly greatneſs, and to render you proſperous and happy beyond the example of all former times: you expect all the ſenſual gratifications which power or wealth can beſtow: but theſe expectations will, moſt aſſuredly, be fruſtrated; for though I, who am now your priſoner and the object of your utter contempt and deriſion; though I am, as one of your own prophets expreſſly predicted of me, *deſpiſed and rejected by you, a man of ſorrows and acquainted with grief*; though, in a word, you ſee in me, none of the characteriſtic marks of *the Meſſiah*, whom you have been ſo anxiouſly expecting, and, on that account, are about to put me to a moſt ignominious and cruel death, as an impoſtor, yet you ſhall ſoon ſee how much you have been miſtaken; you ſhall *ſee the Son of Man*, the Meſſiah, *ſitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven* [a].

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[a] This is another of thoſe paſſages which Mr. Mede and

The effect which this ſolemn declaration on the part of our Lord had upon the minds of the Jewiſh rulers is, if any thing can be, an unequivocal and deciſive proof in what ſenſe they underſtood it; for, as was naturally to be expected from men of their ambitious turn of mind, and with their avowed ſentiments concerning *the nature of the Meſſiah's character*, upon ſuch an occaſion, their reſentment was inſtantaneous, and their rage againſt him was

others have applied to the kingdom of a thouſand years, or to what is called the millennium; but, without entering upon the queſtion, whether this doctrine is well or ill founded, it may, I think, be ſafely affirmed, that this paſſage cannot have any relation to it; for the connection itſelf, as well as the general tenor of the Goſpel hiſtory, appears to me, clearly, to demonſtrate, that it has an excluſive relation to our Lord's controverſy with the Jews, concerning *the true nature of the Meſſiah's character*. To guard againſt its application to any other event, the hiſtorian ſays, απ' αρτι, or απο του νυν, *from the preſent time, ye ſhall ſee the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven.*

If then the genuine meaning of this language of our Lord be, that by *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem* they ſhould have full proof that he was *the true Meſſiah*, his declaration, in Matthew xxiv. that the Jews ſhould *ſee the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory*, will be clearly aſcertained to be of the ſame import. Nor can there be any room for doubt, that Matt. xvi. 27, 28, relate likewiſe to *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*; though they have, by the Biſhop of London, been applied to *the day of judgment*. This learned prelate has given his decided opinion that Matt. xxvi. 64, and xxiv. 30, relate to the deſtruction of the Jews; and no ſufficient reaſon can, I think, be aſſigned why Matt. xvi. 27, 28, ſhould not be ſo applied.

raiſed

raiſed to the higheſt pitch of fury. *Then*, ſays the Evangeliſt, ver. 65, *the high prieſt rent his clothes, ſaying, He hath ſpoken blaſphemy! What think ye? they anſwered, he is guilty of* a crime, which by our law is deſerving of *death*, as a blaſphemer and impoſtor. *Then did they ſpit in his face, and buffetted him, and others ſmote him with the palms of their hands, ſaying, Propheſy unto us, thou Chriſt*, thou that pretendeſt to be the Chriſt, *who is he that ſmote thee?* What greater proofs of rage and indignation, of mockery and inſult, could they poſſibly have diſcovered; or how in a ſtronger manner have expreſſed the extreme grief which the very idea of the diſappointment of their worldly views produced upon their minds? *He hath ſpoken blaſphemy! Away with him, crucify him, crucify him*, was the univerſal cry. And when afterwards the queſtion was put by Pilate, *Whom will ye that I releaſe unto you, Barabbas, or Jeſus who is called Chriſt?* they ſaid, *not this man, but Barabbas*. And upon Pilate's expoſtulating with them upon their preferring *a murderer*, and aſking them *what evil Jeſus had done?* they all ſaid to him, *Let him be crucified!* No crime, in their eſtimation, could equal that which deprived them of proſpects ſo dear to their hearts, and ſo flattering to their pride, and which, in their ſtead, preſented to their view, nothing but ſcenes of horror and deſolation, miſery and ruin! No wonder that, in ſuch circumſtances, they ſhould have

have purſued him with the moſt unrelenting fury, and that nothing could ſatiate it but his blood.

At the accompliſhment of a purpoſe ſo atrocious and bloody, the very heavens mourned. As if aſhamed of ſo foul a deed, the ſun withdrew its light; and, as all the three hiſtorians agree in relating, *there was darkneſs over the whole land from the ſixth to the ninth hour. The veil* alſo *of the temple was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent, and the graves were opened, and many bodies of ſaints which ſlept aroſe.*

The impreſſion which theſe awful and truly miraculous events made upon the minds of the ſpectators, is very particularly noticed in the narration of St. Luke; for, he ſays, that *all the people that were collected together,* επι την θεωριαν, *at that ſpectacle, when they ſaw the things which were done, ſmote their breaſts, and returned.* And he particularly mentions the centurion, the Roman officer, who had the charge of ſeeing the ſentence of our Lord's crucifixion executed, as exclaiming, when he ſaw what had happened, *Certainly this was a righteous man*; or, as St. Matthew has it, *Truly this was the Son of God.*

Theſe extraordinary atteſtations, recorded by the evangelical hiſtorians, to the excellence of our Lord's character, at the moment when he was expiring on the croſs as a notorious malefactor and impoſtor,

impoſtor, for aſſuming the character of the Meſſiah, will be allowed to have a conſiderable weight in removing the odium of his crucifixion. But there was ſtill wanting, in order to the complete vindication of his character, the divine interpoſition, to reſcue him from the dominion of the grave, and to reſtore him again to life. This, our Lord himſelf had rendered abſolutely and eſſentially neceſſary; for he had repeatedly, and in the moſt expreſs and unequivocal terms, foretold, not only that he ſhould *ſuffer many things from the elders, and chief prieſts, and ſcribes, and be* killed, but that *he ſhould be raiſed again, on the third day* after his crucifixion.

How awfully anxious to the diſciples of our Lord muſt the interval between his crucifixion and his reſurrection, have been? His crucifixion, they evidently conſidered as the death-blow to all their hopes and expectations of his being *their Meſſiah*; and, with their ideas of *the nature of the Meſſiah's character*, it could not but be ſo. Their language, in converſation with the ſuppoſed ſtranger who accompanied them to Emmaus, evidently bears the ſtrongeſt marks of deſpondence, and of their having ſuppoſed that they had been following *an impoſtor*. *We truſted*, ſaid they, *that it had been he who ſhould have redeemed Iſrael.* Still ſome faint glimmering of hope appears; for they add, *and beſides all this, to-day is the third day ſince theſe things were done.* But it was a hope in which fear and unbelief

unbelief evidently predominated; for when the women, who had been at the ſepulchre, told the apoſtles that Jeſus was riſen, *their words ſeemed to them to be idle tales.* And the hiſtorian expreſſly ſays, *they believed them not.* They ſeem to have been unwilling, a ſecond time, to have been impoſed upon; and nothing but the overpowering evidence of *the reality* of his reſurrection, appears to have overcome their incredulity.

Such were the original witneſſes of our Lord's reſurrection, and none, under ſuch circumſtances, ſeem leſs likely to have been impoſed upon. Yet all united, in the face of the whole world, in the face of dangers tenfold more formidable than any they had yet experienced, in declaring *before the Jewiſh rulers who had crucified him*, and in the very city where he had been crucified, and that within a few days after the event had taken place, that *that ſame Jeſus whom they had put to death, was riſen from the dead*, and that *they were all witneſſes* of the fact; and that by that aſtoniſhing event, God had evinced, beyond all contradiction, that he was no impoſtor, but *the true Meſſiah*, whom they had all ſo anxiouſly expected! *Therefore, let all the houſe of Iſrael know aſſuredly, that God hath made that ſame Jeſus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Chriſt.* See Acts ii. 22, 23. 32. 36. Again, when the apoſtles were miraculouſly delivered from the priſon into which they had been thrown, for preaching *in the name of Jeſus*, and the high prieſt aſked them, ſaying,

ſaying, *Did we not ſtraitly command, that you ſhould not teach in this name, and behold you have filled Jeruſalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us*; nothing can exceed the bold and manly reply of the apoſtles: *We ought to obey God rather than man* [b]. So, again, when the Jewiſh rulers

[b] A ſimilar language is uſed by Socrates, which, though well known to the learned, will probably not be unacceptable to readers in general. I ſhall preſent it to them as tranſlated by the ingenious author of a Diſſertation upon the Conduct of the Jewiſh Sanhedrim, together with his remarks upon it.

" Should you, to the charge exhibited againſt me, reply, Socrates, we pay no regard to what Anytus has advanced, we acquit you; but upon this expreſs condition, that you are never again to be employed in this manner, nor to teach any more: if you do, you ſhall be put to death. Were you, as I ſaid, to offer me pardon upon theſe terms, my anſwer ſhould be, O Athenians, I highly eſteem and regard you, *but I will rather obey God than you:* and as long as I live, and my ſtrength remains, I will not ceaſe to teach and inſtruct ſuch of you as I ſhall have occaſion to meet in my uſual way. This office I will perform to young and old, to countrymen and ſtrangers; but, in a particular manner to you, my countrymen, with whom I am more nearly connected. For, be aſſured, this is the command of God; and I am perſuaded you enjoy not a greater privilege in the ſtate, than this ſervice which I perform for God."

The learned tranſlator upon this paſſage obſerves, that it has " often, and very juſtly, been admired as one of the fineſt of antiquity." It breathes ſentiments truly excellent, a ſpirit of true heroiſm in his noble contempt of death; of patriotiſm in his affection for his countrymen; and of piety in the ſacred regard he ſhews for God. Now, let the character and ſituation

rulers again commanded them *not to ſpeak at all, nor ſpeak in the name of Jeſus*, it ſeems abſolutely impoſſible not to admire the noble and intrepid firmneſs which they diſplayed; *Whether it be right in the ſight of God to hearken to you more than to God, judge ye; for we cannot but ſpeak the things which we have ſeen and heard.* In the former inſtance, the apoſtle Peter immediately proceeds to charge the Jewiſh rulers with the murder of their Lord, to aſſert his reſurrection from the dead, and to ſtate with preciſion what was the great deſign of the Meſſiah's miſſion. Acts v. 30. *The God of our fathers hath raiſed up his Son Jeſus, whom ye ſlew and hanged on a tree: Him hath God exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour*, not, as you expect, to reſcue you from the yoke of the Romans, and to raiſe you to great worldly proſperity, but *to give repentance to Iſrael, and forgiveneſs of ſins. And we are his witneſſes of theſe things, and ſo is alſo the Holy Spirit, which God hath given to them that obey him.*

tion of the apoſtles, at this juncture, be but duly attended to, and I dare appeal to the impartial world, whether their ſpeech is not as animated, and their conduct as great and noble. This I take notice of, not at all to detract from the honour due to Socrates, (it would be baſe ſo much as to attempt it), but that thoſe gentlemen who are accuſtomed to run down the apoſtles as a ſet of weak contemptible creatures, may conſider how far they are deſerving of ſuch epithets; or it is conſiſtent with candour to give them, when their conduct is ſo ſimilar to that which they ſo juſtly admire in another. P. 9, 10.

When

When the Jewiſh rulers had heard that, and no hopes were held out to them of his being a mighty conqueror, to promote the objects of their worldly ambition, the evangelical hiſtorian relates, that *they were cut to the heart, and took counſel to ſlay them.* But they were over-ruled by the ſage advice of Gamaliel. *Refrain*, ſays he, *from theſe men, and let them alone; for, if this counſel, or this work be of men, it will come to nought, but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, leſt haply*, by purſuing violent meaſures, *ye be found to fight againſt God: and to him they agreed. And, when they had called the apoſtles, and beaten them, they again commanded that they ſhould not ſpeak in the name of Jeſus, and let them go. And they departed from the preſence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to ſuffer ſhame for his name. And*, notwithſtanding the injunction, accompanied with the ſtripes which they had received, *they ceaſed not to teach and to preach Jeſus*, τον χριστον, *the Meſſiah.*

From theſe inſtances, to which many more, collected from the hiſtory of the Acts of the Apoſtles, might be added, it appears unqueſtionable that the apoſtles were fully convinced, not only that Jeſus was *the Meſſiah*, but that they were now, for *the firſt time*, diveſted of their prejudices, and completely underſtood *the nature and deſign of the Meſſiah's character and office.* They now no longer expected him to aſſume *the character of a temporal prince*, which, till after his reſurrection, was the

chief object of their ambition, as appears from the queſtion which they put to him, ſubſequentt to that event. Acts i. 6. *Lord wilt thou, at this time, reſtore the kingdom to Iſrael?*

This, however, was by no means the caſe with reſpect to the great body of *the Jewiſh nation.* They, on the contrary, continued with unceaſing anxiety to look for a perſon who ſhould reſcue them from the yoke of the Romans, and raiſe them to the diſtinguiſhed pre-eminence of being *the lords of the world.* But, in the courſe of our Lord's miniſtry, he frequently hinted, that *the coming of the Meſſiah* would, with regard to them, have a very different iſſue. And, towards the cloſe of his life, he predicted, with unexampled clearneſs and preciſion, that *the coming of the Meſſiah* would, to them, be *in clouds*, and as *in the days of Noah. The Son of Man ſhall come in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. As the days of Noah were*, which were days of great temporal calamity, *ſo ſhall the* nature of the *coming of the Son of Man be.* And the perſpicuity of *the true nature of his coming*, as the Meſſiah, in oppoſition to the manner in which the Jewiſh nation expected him to come, is thus deſcribed. *As the lightning cometh out of the eaſt, and ſhineth even unto the weſt; ſo ſhall alſo the true* nature of *the coming of the Son of Man* for perſpicuity *be.* Nor is there any one ſubject, throughout the whole goſpel hiſtory, upon which our Lord expatiates, ſo largely, as on this; none on which he ſo decidedly

decidedly reſts the iſſue of his controverſy with his countrymen, as to *the true nature of his character*. So that his language, upon this ſubject, imports nothing leſs than this, If Jeruſalem be not, in this generation, deſtroyed, then *the Lord hath not ſpoken by me!*

The ſigns of this truly awful and important event were pointed out by our Lord with the greateſt particularity and exactneſs, for this expreſs purpoſe, that his diſciples might *watch* for it, to avoid being involved in the deſtruction that was approaching, and that they might be enabled to ſupport the faith of their followers againſt the inſinuations of their adverſaries, who might tauntingly ſay, as St. Peter and Joſephus inform us, they actually did ſay, *Where is the promiſe of his coming; for ſince the fathers fell aſleep, all things continue as they were, from the beginning of the creation.*

Upon the ſuppoſition of the truth of the goſpel hiſtory, it is utterly impoſſible to imagine the apoſtles ſhould have been inattentive to their divine Maſter's prediction of this awful event, and to the ſigns of *its near approach*; more eſpecially after they became acquainted with *the true nature of his character*. But, in adverting to this event, it muſt be obvious to every one, that the utmoſt caution and circumſpection were requiſite, leſt by expreſſing themſelves too plainly, they might materially injure the cauſe in which they were engaged, and enhance the ſufferings to which they were already

expoſed.

expoſed. This was a conduct which our Lord had himſelf particularly pointed out to them, in his direction, to be *wiſe as ſerpents, and harmleſs as doves.*

To anſwer theſe important purpoſes, we find the apoſtles, in their epiſtles, adopting, as was extremely natural for them, *as Jews* and as pious and good men, the language which was in familiar uſe in the writings of the prophets, in deſcribing *the near approach of great temporal calamities:* ſuch as, that *the Lord is at hand*; the *coming of the Lord draweth nigh*; *the day of the Lord is coming*; and more eſpecially the phraſe, *the coming of Chriſt*, ſo aptly pointed out to them in our Lord's own language, in deſcribing *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem.*

The following are a few examples of the language of the prophets, in deſcribing *the near approach of temporal calamities.* The prophet Iſaiah, when ſpeaking of the near approach of *the deſtruction of Babylon*, ſays, chap. vi. 9, *Howl ye, for* THE DAY OF THE LORD *is at hand. It ſhall come as a deſtruction from the Almighty. Behold,* THE DAY OF THE LORD *cometh to lay the land deſolate.* Joel i. 15, *Alas, for the day, for* THE DAY OF THE LORD *is at hand, and as a deſtruction from the Almighty, it ſhall come.* Zeph. i. 7, *Hold thy peace at the preſence of the Lord God; for* THE DAY OF THE LORD *is at hand; for the Lord hath prepared a ſacrifice, he hath bid his gueſts.* Ezek. xxx. 2, 3, *Son of Man, propheſy and ſay, Thus ſaith the Lord God, Howl ye, woe worth*

worth the day, for the Lord is near, even the day of the Lord is near, a cloudy day. And, moſt remarkable is the expreſſion of the prophet Amos, chap. v. 18, particularly if compared with our Lord's deſcription, Luke xvii. 22, *Woe unto you that deſire the day of the Lord. To what end is it for you to deſire it? The day of the Lord is darkneſs, and not light.*

With theſe examples in view, let us attend to the language of St. Paul, in the vth chapter of his firſt Epiſtle to the Theſſalonians. *Yourſelves know perfectly, that* THE DAY OF THE LORD *ſo cometh as a thief in the night; for when they,* i. e. as I ſuppoſe the apoſtle to mean, the unbelieving Jews, *ſhall ſay, Peace and ſafety, then ſudden deſtruction cometh upon them as upon a woman with child, and they ſhall not eſcape.* With what peculiar propriety does the apoſtle add, in the following verſe, of thoſe who were acquainted with our Lord's prediction of *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem: Ye brethren are not in darkneſs, that* THAT DAY, the day of the Lord, *ſhould overtake you as a thief! Ye are all the children of light and of the day,* ſeeing that *ye know perfectly that* THE DAY OF THE LORD *ſo cometh as a thief in the night. We are not of the night, nor of darkneſs.* And it is with equal propriety that he founds upon it his ſubſequent exhortation, ver. 6, *Therefore let us not ſleep as do others, but let us watch and be ſober.*

I think it is impoſſible not to ſee the ſtriking coincidence and harmony between this language

and that of our Lord, when he ſays, Matt. xxiv. 38, 39, *As in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came and took them all away; ſo ſhall alſo* THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN *be: Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.* All the commentators upon St. Paul's language have noticed this reſemblance, and referred to theſe very paſſages. And nothing, I think, but a miſconception of the meaning of our Lord's prediction, and the unjuſtifiable introduction of types and double meanings, could have thrown a veil over the genuine meaning of the apoſtle in the chapter under conſideration. It is ſo plain, that he who runs may read and underſtand it.

I am well aware that the phraſe, *the times and the ſeaſons*, in the firſt verſe of this chapter, has been applied by many commentators to "the time of the duration of the world, and the particular ſeaſon at which Chriſt ſhall come to judge mankind." But there ſeems to have been no reaſon for the uſe of an ambiguous phraſe in deſcribing *the day of judgment*, but an obvious one, as has already been obſerved, if it related to *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem!*

The true meaning of this phraſe ſeems to have been very accurately ſtated by the late Biſhop Pearce. For upon the diſciples aſking our Lord,

Wilt

Wilt thou, at this reſtore the kingdom to Iſrael? his comment is—Wilt thou take the Jews from under the Roman yoke, and give to them a king and kingdom of their own? He gives them no direct anſwer to their queſtion; but his words ſeem to imply, that when the Holy Ghoſt was come upon them, they ſhould then know *the nature of his kingdom.* And it is remarkable, that when Dr. Benſon and Dr. Macknight, have no other object in view, than to aſcertain the genuine meaning of the phraſe, they give it with ſufficient accuracy [c].

With reſpect to the ſecond chapter of the ſecond Epiſtle to the Theſſalonians; it has, I think, been univerſally allowed to have an immediate relation to the ſame ſubject. And indeed there are unqueſtionable proofs of the fact; for *the coming of Chriſt is* evidently, upon every ſuppoſition, ſynonymous with *the coming of the Lord,* in the former chapter. In that chapter too, he ſays, *Ye have no need that I write unto you.* In this, he aſks them if they did not *remember, that when he was yet with them* (previous to his writing his firſt Epiſtle), *he told them of theſe things?*

There are, I think, beſides, ſome very ſtriking and unanſwerable proofs, that *the coming of Chriſt*, in the firſt verſe of this chapter, relates, not to *the end of the world,* but to *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem.* Among

[c] See Macknight's Goſpel Hiſtory, and Benſon's Hiſtory of the Firſt Planting of the Chriſtian Religion, p. 16.

theſe, the chief, perhaps, is, the exact correſpondence of the apoſtle's language, with that of our Lord, in his prediction of *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*; as may be ſeen by viewing them together.

Matt. xxiv. 3.	2 Theſſ. ii. 1, 2, 3.
What ſhall be the ſign of thy coming?	*Now we beſeech you concerning the coming of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt.*
V. 6.	
See that ye be not troubled.	
Mark xiii. 7.	V. 2.
Be ye not troubled.	*Be not ſoon ſhaken in mind or be troubled.*
Luke xxi. 9.	
Be not terrified.	
Matt. xxiv. 4.	
Take heed that no man deceive you.	
Mark xiii. 5.	2 Theſſ. ii. 3.
Take heed leſt any man deceive you.	*Let no man deceive you by any means.*
Luke xxi. 8.	
Take heed that ye be not deceived.	
Matt. xxiv. 31.	2 Theſſ. ii. 1.
And they ſhall gather together his elect.	*Now concerning our gathering together unto him.*

The Greek, both in the Epiſtle and Goſpels, is as follows:

Matt. xxiv. 3.	2 Theſſ. ii. 1.
τι το σημειον της σης παρουσιας;	Ερωτωμεν δε υμας, αδελφοι, υπερ της παρουσιας του Κυριου ημων Ιησου χριστου.

Matt.

Matt. xxiv. 6.	
Ορατε μη θροεισθε.	
Mark xiii. 7.	2 Theſſ. ii. 2.
μη θροεισθε.	Εις το μη ταχεως σαλευθηναι υμας απο του νοος, μητε θροεισθαι.
Luke xxi. 9.	
μη πτοηθητε.	
Matt. xxiv. 4.	
Βλεπετε μη τις υμας πλανηση.	
Mark xiii. 5.	2 Theſſ. ii. 3.
Βλεπετε μη τις υμας πλανηση.	Μητις υμας εξαπατηση κατα μηδεν τροπον.
Luke xxi. 8.	
Βλεπετε μη πλανηθητε.	
Matt. xxiv. 31.	2 Theſſ. ii. 1.
Επισυναξουσι τους εκλεκτους.	ημων επισυναγωγης επ' αυτον.

Allowing for the different ſituations of our Lord and his apoſtles, and for the different ways which different writers will naturally have in ſpeaking upon the ſame ſubject, theſe coincidences are ſufficiently ſtriking to induce an attentive obſerver to think there is, at leaſt, a very ſtrong preſumption that the apoſtle, in his deſcription of *the coming of Chriſt*, had an immediate and direct reference to our Lord's prediction of *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, and conſequently that the reaſoning which has been adopted in endeavouring to aſcertain the genuine meaning of the fifth chapter of his former epiſtle, is ſtrongly corroborated by it; for, as has been obſerved, it has been generally admitted that both chapters relate to *the ſame ſubject*.

It is not my intention in this work, to enter into a critical examination of the whole of this celebrated

chapter[d]; but it would be doing great injuſtice to my argument, not to trace out the leading ideas contained in it, particularly as they appear to me to harmonize, in an uncommon degree, with the general tenor of the goſpel hiſtory. When, for inſtance, the apoſtle ſays, v. 3, *That day*—the day of Chriſt, or the day of the Lord—*ſhall not come except* η Αποστασια—*the apoſtacy, ſhall come firſt*, he ſeems to me, moſt decidedly, to allude to *the rebellion of the Jews* againſt the Romans, which was the grand preparatory ſtep to the deſtruction predicted by our Lord; for, in this prediction, he ſays, Matt. xxiv. 6, 7, *ye ſhall hear of wars and rumours of wars; for nation ſhall riſe againſt nation, and kingdom againſt kingdom*; which is preciſely the original meaning of the term Αποστασια, apoſtacy, made uſe of by the apoſtle.

Mr. Mede, Biſhop Newton, Biſhop Halliſax, Dr. Benſon, Dr. Macknight, and Mr. Zouch, and, in general, all the advocates for the application of the contents of this chapter, to the apoſtacy of the church of Rome, are decidedly of opinion that the apoſtacy here mentioned was not of *a civil*, but of *a religious nature*, not *a revolt from government*, but *a defection from the true religion and worſhip of God*. But though they have endeavoured

[d] This has already been done at large in my Triumphs of Chriſtianity over Infidelity, from page 191 to 226; and a very able writer, in a correſpondence with the author, has very candidly acknowledged he can diſcern no flaw in the reaſoning there adopted.

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to prove, by an appeal to thoſe paſſages of ſcripture, where the term *apoſtacy* is made uſe of, that this was St. Paul's meaning, yet, I truſt I ſhall be excuſed, if I ſay that none of them all appear to me to have given that critical and minute attention to the genuine meaning of the word, as uſed by the ſacred writers, to warrant an implicit acquieſcence in their opinion.

The term Αποστασια, *apoſtacy*, when conſidered in the abſtract and without relation to any particular ſubject, moſt unqueſtionably means *a departure from any thing*. And there needs no better evidence that this is the genuine meaning of the word, than that the ſacred writers, particularly thoſe of the New Teſtament, always uſe it in this ſenſe. Thus St. Luke ſays, Acts xxi. 21, that St. Paul taught Αποστασια, *apoſtacy*—but to render the writer's meaning perfectly clear, ſome addition was neceſſary, and therefore it is added, that it was an apoſtacy *from Moſes*. Αποστασιαν διδασκεις απο μωσεως. *Thou teacheſt an apoſtacy from Moſes*. St. Paul, in his firſt epiſtle to Timothy, ſays, ch. iv. 1, *In the latter times ſome* Αποστησονται *ſhall depart*; but, to render it clear what he meant, he adds, that *they ſhould depart* της πιστεως *from the faith*. Once more, the writer to the Hebrews, ſays, ch. iii. 12, *Take heed, brethren, leſt there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief*, εν τω αποστηναι *in departing*; but, to make himſelf fully underſtood, he adds, that they were not to depart from *the living God*.

The term Αποστασια, *apoſtacy*, in the chapter under

conſideration, has no addition annexed to it, and muſt therefore be determined by the ſubject to which it is related, and that, it cannot be denied, is *the coming of Chriſt*. Whether that coming relates to *the day of judgment*, or to *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, is the matter in diſpute[e]. I have already produced no ſlight evidence, that it is the latter of theſe events; and I am perſuaded that that evidence will increaſe, as we proceed in our examination of the ſubſequent part of the chapter.

A careful attention to the ſame ſources of information to which an appeal has hitherto been made, will, if I am not very much miſtaken, ſhew that the appellations of *the man of ſin* and *the ſon*

[e] It is not unworthy of the reader's notice, that Joſephus, in his hiſtory of the Jewiſh War, which ended in the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, conſtantly uſes the term Αποστασια, *apoſtacy*, to denote *the rebellion of the Jews* againſt the Romans.

With reſpect to the ſentiments of the early fathers of the Chriſtian church, I ſhall not trouble myſelf nor my readers with any remarks upon them, farther than to obſerve, that Mr. Leigh, in his Critica Sacra, in a note upon the word Αποστασια, *apoſtacy*, ſays, "ſome interpret it, de defectione ab Imperio Romano, as Ambroſe, Hierom, Tertullian, of a revolt from the Roman government. Others, and more, interpret it, de defectione à fide. Chryſoſt. Œcum. Theoph. Theodoret and Auguſt. de Civit. Dei of *an apoſtacy from the faith*. And Mr. Hardy, in his note on 2 Theſſ. ii. 3. ſays—Αποστασια à fide defectionem generaliter denotat—the word apoſtacy, denotes *a departure from the faith*. But he obſerves—Hic defectionem Judeorum ab imperio Romano ſignificare videtur. Here it ſeems to ſignify, the revolt of the Jews from the Roman government.

of

of perdition, were meant of *the Jewiſh nation*, and that in fact, he had in his eye, an excluſive regard to them. In the xxiii. of Matthew, our Lord deſcribes, with great particularity and minuteneſs, *the character* of the rulers of that nation, charging them with crimes of the deepeſt die, moſt probably, with a view to prepare the minds of his diſciples for the awful fate that awaited them; and towards the cloſe of this chapter, he has this remarkable expreſſion, v. 32, *Fill ye up*, or rather, in the form of a prediction, πληρωσατε, *ye will fill up the meaſure of your fathers*, i. e. as the context ſeems plainly to imply, of *the iniquities of your fathers*. And then, as our Lord tells them, *their houſe would be left unto them deſolate*.

It is remarkable that the apoſtle Paul, in his 1ſt Ep. ch. ii. 15, 16, ſays, the Jews, by their flagitious conduct in *killing the Lord Jeſus and their own prophets, and their forbidding them to ſpeak to the Gentiles that they might be ſaved*, were proceeding, εις το αναπληρωσαι, *completely to fill up the meaſure of their iniquities*, as a veſſel or meaſure is filled up, till it can hold no more; and that, in conſequence of their EXTREME WICKEDNESS, *wrath was coming upon them*, εις τελος, *to the uttermoſt*, or to their utter extinction, as a nation.

The learned Dr. Beattie, ſpeaking of the extreme flagitiouſneſs of the character of the Jews, as a nation, ſays, "The virtue of the Roman people was not, in thoſe days, exemplary. Yet when

when we compare their manners, as they occaſionally appear in the ſacred hiſtory, with thoſe of the Jews, how are we ſtruck with the difference! The Romans are indeed Pagans; but they are not deſtitute of that good nature and love of juſtice which one expects to find in a civilized nation. The Jews are ſeldom ſeen in any other character than that of bloody barbarians. Pontius Pilate avowed our Lord's innocence, and ſhewed an inclination to ſave his life; Gallio, proconſul of Achaia, acted with good ſenſe and moderation when Paul was brought before him; Claudius Lyſias, Feſtus, and Felix, in their treatment of the ſame apoſtle, were not unmercifully ſevere; and the centurion, whoſe priſoner he was, in his voyage to Italy, was very much attached to him. But the Jewiſh prieſts, ſcribes, and elders, conſpired to murder our Saviour without a trial; ſuborned perſons to bear falſe witneſs againſt him; and the ſame aſſembly, or their ſucceſſors in office, connived at a ſcheme, and of courſe concurred in it, for the aſſaſſination of Paul. In a word, it appears that the greater part of what we call the better ſort of the Jews of that age, when they had reſolved upon any meaſure, would not heſitate to employ any means, however unjuſt, cruel, or ſhameful, in the accompliſhment of it[f].

Nor doth the extreme depravity of the Jews, as

[f] See Beattie's Evidences, p. 140, &c. vol. i.

a nation,

a nation, appear from the Chriſtian records only; for Joſephus, who had ample means of knowing them well, in the fulleſt manner confirms what is there ſaid of them. "To give a particular account of all their iniquities were endleſs. Thus much, in general, it may ſuffice to ſay, that there never was a city which ſuffered ſuch miſeries, nor a race of men, from the beginning of the world, which ſo abounded in wickedneſs. I verily believe, that if the Romans had delayed to deſtroy theſe wicked wretches, the city would either have been ſwallowed up by the earth, or overwhelmed by the water, or ſtruck with fire from heaven, as another Sodom; for it produced a far more impious generation than thoſe who ſuffered ſuch puniſhments."

The apoſtle Paul, who certainly was no ſtranger to the character of the Jews, as a nation, and who appears, from what he has ſaid of them in his former epiſtle, ch. ii. 15, 16, to have been deeply impreſſed with a ſenſe of their unparalled atrocities, has perſonified them, and, without particularly mentioning them by name, has repreſented them as *a man of ſin*—as one whoſe whole compoſition was ſin and nothing elſe. And it has this ſingular advantage of conveying, in a ſingle ſentence, all that could have been ſaid in the moſt maſterly deſcription. And as ſin and puniſhment are very naturally connected together, eſpecially when arrived at ſuch an enormous height, the apoſtle carries

carries on the perſonification, under the relative idea of *a ſon of perdition*—of one devoted to deſtruction and the natural offſpring of ſuch a parent.

But how, it will be ſaid, is the apoſtle's ſubſequent language to be applied to the Jews as a nation? What evidence is there, from the hiſtory of thoſe times, either ſacred or prophane, that this *man of ſin*, this *ſon of perdition*, *exalted himſelf above all that is called God, or that is worſhipped; ſo that he, as a God, ſat in the temple of God, ſhewing himſelf that he was God?*

It will be neceſſary, in anſwer to theſe queſtions, to aſcertain what is the preciſe meaning of the former part of this deſcription. And I ſhall not be ſuſpected of being too partial to my own opinion if I ſtate thoſe of Dr. Benſon and Biſhop Hallifax, the profeſſed advocates of its application to the church of Rome.

The former ſays, "Princes and magiſtrates are, in ſcripture, ſometimes called Gods. See Pſalm lxxii. 1. 6. 7. cxxxix. 1, &c. And he farther ſays, "it is well-known, that in the apoſtle's days Σεβαστος was the Greek name, or title of the Roman emperor. See Acts xxv. 21. 25. If therefore we underſtand Σεβασμα of the imperial dignity, then the apoſtle riſes in his diſcourſe and propheſies that the man of ſin would exalt himſelf, not only above every one that is called a God, or temporal potentate, but even above the majeſty and dignity of Cæſar, the Roman emperor himſelf, the higheſt

higheſt of earthly gods. Accordingly it is in the ſingular number σεβασμα, and not σεβασματα. The apoſtle has not ſpoken out ſo plainly as to ſay Σεβαστος; but, as he hath connected σεβασμα with *every one that is called a god*, he hath directed us how to underſtand him, and ſpoken as plainly as it was then proper for him to do."

Biſhop Halliſax, in his ſermon on the Man of Sin, p. 143, ſays, that "by *oppoſing and exalting himſelf above all that is called a God*, or that is worſhipped, may be only meant, that the man of ſin ſhould exerciſe a ſuper-eminent juriſdiction over the kings and princes of this world."

In the early part of this work, it was ſhewn, that it was a peculiar and diſtinguiſhing feature in the national character of the Jews, that in looking for *the coming of their Meſſiah*, they one and all expected him to appear as *a temporal prince*, to raiſe them as a nation to *univerſal empire*. Their expectation that their Meſſiah would conduct them to this *univerſal empire*, appears to me therefore to be what the apoſtle terms, the man of ſin *exalting himſelf above all that is called a God, or that is worſhipped*, above the imperial majeſty and dignity of Cæſar himſelf, the higheſt of earthly gods. To obtain this fancied empire, they rejected our Lord, rebelled againſt the Romans, and lent a willing ear to any one who afforded them the moſt diſtant proſpect of ſucceſs.

To this interpretation, I am aware, it may be objected, that though the Jews graſped at this *univerſal*

verſal empire, they never did attain to it, and that therefore they could not have been the objects intended by St. Paul. But to this it may, I think, very fairly be replied, that the apoſtle's language does not amount to a declaration that *the man of ſin* had actually attained to that univerſal empire, but was only *endeavouring to obtain it*. The exact literal ſenſe of the original ὁ ἀντικειμενος και υπεραιρομενος is, *who is oppoſing and exalting himſelf*; which evidently implies, that he had not, in reality, accompliſhed his ambitious purpoſe. And, it is not a little remarkable, that that able ſcholar and judicious divine, Dr. Jortin, when referring to this very paſſage, ſays, that verbs active ſometimes ſignify a deſign and endeavour to perform a thing, whether accompliſhed or not[g].

That the other part of the apoſtle's language—*the ſitting in the temple of God and ſhewing himſelf as a God*, is deſcriptive of an *eccleſiaſtical tyranny*, is unqueſtionable; and that the Jews, as *a nation*, came under this deſcription is, I think, equally ſo. While our Lord was upon earth, he told them to their faces, that *they ſhut up the kingdom of heaven againſt men, and that they would neither go in themſelves nor ſuffer others, who were entering, to go in*. It was the ſame tyrannical ſpirit which led them with ſuch relentleſs fury to perſecute our Lord himſelf, and at length to accompliſh their diabolical and inhuman purpoſe of putting him to a moſt cruel and

[g] See Dr. Jortin on the Chriſtian Religion, p. 185. 2d Edit.

ignominious

ignominious death, after having ſubjected him to the moſt wanton and barbarous inſults and the moſt degrading and afflicting contumely and reproach that ever diſgraced a court of judicature.

With reſpect to their treatment of his diſciples, we are told, that after his removal they continued their perſecutions with a ſimilar fury, *beating ſome and killing ſome*, hunting them about *from city to city, and commanding them not to ſpeak at all nor teach in the name of Jeſus.* And the whole hiſtory of the Acts of the Apoſtles is an irrefragable proof that this characteriſtic feature of the man of ſin, *ſitting in the temple of God and ſhewing himſelf as a God*, belonged to none, with more propriety, than to *the Jewiſh nation*; particularly as their eccleſiaſtical tyranny was literally carried on, in *the very temple of God!* But I cannot ſay ſo much to the purpoſe or ſo much to my own and the reader's ſatisfaction upon this ſubject, as has been already ſaid by the learned Dr. Whitby. "When," ſays he, "the apoſtles began to preach the word of life, the high prieſt, the captain of the temple, and the ſadducees, Acts iv. 1, and the whole order of the prieſthood, v. 6, ſtyled το συνεδριον, *the ſanhedrim*, v. 15, *commanded them not to ſpeak nor teach in the name of Jeſus*, v. 18; on which account theſe rulers are ſaid to be aſſembled *againſt the Lord and againſt his Chriſt*, v. 26. And the anſwer of the apoſtles to them is, that *God was rather to be obeyed than man.* After this the high prieſt and all his aſſociates place

the apoſtles εν τω συνεδριω, in *the ſanhedrim*, Acts, v. 17, 27, calling them to an account for diſobeying their commands; and having received this anſwer from the apoſtles, that *God muſt be obeyed rather than man*, they beat them in the *ſanhedrim*, and again *command them not to ſpeak in the name of Jeſus*, ver. 40, 41. Soon after we find Stephen brought before the ſcribes and elders εις το συνεδριον, *into the ſanhedrim*, chap. vi. 12, and the high prieſt, ch. vii. 1, and they who ſat εν τω συνεδριω, *in the ſanhedrim*, having examined him, and the witneſſes againſt him, *they ſtoned Stephen*, v. 59; which death could only be inflicted on him by *the ſanhedrim*. After this, Saul receives *letters from the high prieſt*, ch. ix. 1, and from *all the elders*, ch. xxii. 5, *to bind all Chriſtians* he could find in any of their ſynagogues *and bring them to Jeruſalem*, Acts ix. 2. 14. Yea, in the ſecond, or as Biſhop Pearſon ſaith, in the fourth year of Nero, the high prieſt, και ολον το συνεδριον, *and the whole ſanhedrim* meet, Acts xxii. 30, and Paul is brought before them, ch. xxiii. 1. Yea, when the war was begun, affairs ſeem ſtill to be ordered by the high prieſt and ſanhedrim; for it was after the flight of Ceſtius Gallus from Jeruſalem that Joſephus was made governor of Galilee, and thence he writes τω συνεδριω των Ιερυσολυμιτων to *the ſanhedrim* of Jeruſalem for inſtruction."

This learned writer further obſerves, that only the Jewiſh ſanhedrim, their prieſts, high prieſts, and doctors, or expounders of the law, ſat *in the temple*

temple of God, then properly ſo called; and there the high prieſt and the ſanhedrim took upon them the power of judging in capital cauſes. Thus they ſtoned Stephen: thus alſo they ſtoned James the brother of our Lord and others with him; and St. Paul perſecuted the Chriſtians even to death by their authority, Acts xxii. 4, 5, and thus they *ſat in the temple of God.* [h]

St.

[h] Dr. Benſon was too well acquainted with the goſpel hiſtory, not to perceive that this part of St. Paul's deſcription was ſtrictly applicable to the Jews, and accordingly he readily allows that the Scribes and Phariſees actually did arrogate to themſelves a divine authority, and therefore might be ſaid to *ſit in the temple of God.* But, he ſays, the apoſtle could not foretel that as a future event. They did ſo already, and for ſome time they had done ſo. And he mentions Dr. Whitby as alledging that the apoſtle does not foretel what would be, but ſpeaks of what was already, as to that particular, the man of ſin's ſitting in the temple of God. But, ſays Dr. Benſon, the ſeries of the prophecy will not bear that interpretation; for though he ſometimes ſpeaks in the *preſent*, he is all along to be underſtood in *the future tenſe*, as we find the apoſtles and prophets often uſing the preſent for the future in their predictions.

I am not inclined to controvert the truth of the obſervation, that *the preſent* is often uſed for *the future* in the language of prophecy, but this, I think, is not an inſtance of the kind. On the contrary, the apoſtle appears to me to have diſtinguiſhed with great accuracy and preciſion, what was yet *future*, from what had already taken place. Of the apoſtacy which was to precede *the coming of Chriſt*, he moſt unqueſtionably ſpeaks as being yet *future*. Of the ανομος—*the lawleſs*

St. Paul's ſubſequent deſcription, that *the Lord ſhould deſtroy* this *man of ſin*, &c. *with the ſpirit* or breath *of his mouth*, if the phraſe *the coming of the Lord* be admitted to be a proper language to point out *the near approach* of a great *temporal calamity*, is of eaſy ſolution. And the phraſe, *the brightneſs of his coming*, appears to have a ſingular propriety in it, when it is compared with our Lord's language in the xxivth of Matthew, v. 27. *For as the lightning cometh out of the eaſt, and ſhineth even unto the weſt, ſo ſhall alſo η παρουσια, the coming of the Son of Man be.* As *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem* was the cloſing evidence of the controverſy between our Lord and the Jews concerning *the true nature of the Meſſiah's character*, the phraſe, *the brightneſs of his coming*, ſeems peculiarly adapted to expreſs the ultimate iſſue of that controverſy! The Jews would not admit any one to be *the true Meſſiah* who did not profeſs to raiſe them to great *temporal proſperity*. Our Lord told them, as the laſt and moſt deciſive proof, that they had totally miſ-

or diſobedient *one*, he ſpeaks as yet *to be revealed*; but, as has already been obſerved, he ſpeaks of the man of ſin as then actually oppoſing and exalting himſelf above all that is called a God, or that is worſhipped, and as ſitting in the temple of God; for the verbs, in the original, as well as in the tranſlation, are all in the preſent tenſe. It ſeems therefore, in this inſtance, to be an unwarrantable aſſertion, that the apoſtle is all along to be underſtood in the future tenſe, and an unjuſtifiable liberty taken with his language.

taken

taken *the true nature of the Meſſiah's character*, that Jeruſalem ſhould, in that generation, be deſtroyed, and therefore the apoſtle very properly ſays, that event would be a bright and ſplendid evidence of their erroneous ideas upon the ſubject.

The coming of the falſe Meſſiahs, *after the working of Satan, with all power, and ſigns, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableneſs of unrighteouſneſs in them that periſh*, in the 9th and 10th verſes, cannot, I think, but bring to the reader's recollection, our Lord's language, when deſcribing the ſigns of the approaching deſtruction of Jeruſalem. It is, indeed, ſo ſtriking, that all the commentators have taken notice of it; and Mr. Kett, in particular, having quoted our Lord's words, "*There ſhall ariſe falſe Chriſts and falſe prophets, and ſhall ſhew great ſigns and wonders; inſomuch that, if it were poſſible, they ſhall deceive the very elect*," ſays, theſe words clearly relate, not only to the prognoſtics, but to circumſtances which happened during the ſiege." And in his note on our Lord's language, he ſays, "Joſephus makes uſe of the exact words, *ſigns and wonders*, σημεια και τερατα, when ſpeaking of the falſe prophets foretold by our Saviour.[1]"

Such are the accumulated evidences that this chapter relates, *excluſively*, to our Lord's prediction of *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*; and it appears

[1] See Kett's Hiſtory, the Interpreter of Prophecy, vol. i. p. 230-1. 3d Edit.

to me to conſtitute a moſt admirable proof, not only of the harmony that ſubſiſts between St. Paul's language and that of the goſpel hiſtory, but of the general authenticity of the whole.

I cannot but add, that it appears to me that the peculiar intereſt which the Theſſalonians are repreſented to have had in the matter, and the earneſtneſs with which he preſſes it upon them, give a conſiderable weight to theſe evidences. *Now* WE BESEECH YOU *concerning the coming of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt. Remember ye not that I told you of theſe things? Stand faſt and hold the traditions which ye have been taught.*

That in the moment of paſſion and the warmth of controverſy, naturally ariſing from the reformation from the errors of popery, this chapter ſhould have been applied to the church of Rome, can create no ſurpriſe; for eccleſiaſtical tyranny, or indeed any tyranny, when ſuffered to grow to any great extent, is extremely ſimilar. But that men of great learning and abilities—men who have dedicated a large portion of their time to the ſtudy of this ſubject, in the calm retreats of their cloſets, and in unclouded ſeaſons of proſperity, ſhould have ſo applied it, is ſcarcely to be accounted for, but from their not having attended to *the goſpel hiſtory* as an hiſtory of the controverſy between our Lord and the Jews concerning *the true nature of the Meſſiah's character.*

With reſpect to the antichriſt of St. John, it appears

appears to me, to be equally improper to apply it to the apoſtacy of the church of Rome. In the controverſy among the learned, concerning the time when St. John's epiſtles were written, they ſeem to me very properly to reſt the evidence of its being written before *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, upon the language which he has adopted concerning antichriſt. Mr. Pyle, in his preface to this epiſtle, ſays—" his mentioning *the laſt hour*, i. e. Chriſtianity aboliſhing the Jewiſh diſpenſation, along with *the antichriſts and falſe prophets* that our Saviour foretold would be the forerunners of the deſtruction of that nation, ſeem moſt ſtrongly to intimate the time of writing this epiſtle to have been before *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*.

Archbiſhop Newcome has obſerved, that Grotius's note upon 1 John ii. 18, is well worth conſidering. Ultima hora, i. e. ultimum tempus, ubi ad Judæos ſermo eſt, ſignificat tempus proximum excidio urbis ac templi et reipublicæ Judæorum." And the archbiſhop, with great propriety and good ſenſe, adds, " and the words, *whereby we know that it is the laſt time*, have much force, if we ſuppoſe that they refer to our Lord's prophecies, viz. of the deſtruction of Jeruſalem.[i] "

To theſe teſtimonies I beg leave to add that of the preſent Biſhop of Lincoln. Speaking of the date of this epiſtle, he ſays—" ſome have ſuppoſed

[i] See Archbiſhop Newcome's Obſervations, p. 192.

that it was written *before* and others *after* the deſtruction of Jeruſalem. In the following paſſage, *It is the laſt time, and as we have heard that antichriſt ſhall come, even now there are many antichriſts, whereby we know it is the laſt time*, the apoſtle ſeems to allude to the approaching diſſolution of the Jewiſh ſtate, and to Chriſt's predictions concerning the falſe teachers who were to appear before the deſtruction of Jeruſalem."

Biſhop Hurd ſays, "It is eaſy to give a juſt expoſition of the text, *Little children, it is the laſt time*, or hour; that is, the deſtruction of Jeruſalem is at hand, as indeed it followed very ſoon after the date of this epiſtle." Again, he ſays, that "the appearance of falſe Chriſts and falſe prophets (of which there were many, according to our Lord's prediction, in St. John's time) indicated the arrival of that hour that was to be fatal to the Jewiſh ſtate." The learned biſhop adds, but, as appears to me, without any authority from St. John, that "they were at the ſame time, the types and forerunners of a ſtill more dreadful power, which ſhould be revealed in *the latter times*, in a future period, when that calamity was paſt.[k]"

As the learned prelate has profeſſed, expreſsly, to examine the prophecies by the light of ſober criticiſm and authentic hiſtory, becauſe he ſays "it is no new or difficult thing to miſrepreſent *facts*,

k See Hurd on the Prophecies, vol. ii. p. 9. 5th edit.

and to misinterpret *scripture*; to pervert, in short, these two instruments of truth to any ends, which prejudice hath in view," p. 4, 5, he should himself have been particularly cautious of making assertions without proof, and still more so, not to have deviated from his own accurate description of the apostle's genuine meaning. But, alas, how widely does he stray from it? And how little ground is there for his assertion, that such a power should arise in the Christian church; or that St. John appeals to a tradition to that purpose which was then current among the disciples?[1] The apostle does, indeed say, that those to whom he wrote *had* HEARD *that antichrist* should come; but this tradition appears evidently to relate to our Lord's prediction of the coming of false Christs, and the apostle says, that there then were *many antichrists, whereby they knew that it was the last time.* But not one word does he say about the rising of any power in the Christian church, in a future period, when that calamity was past: nor does he give the slightest hint that they were the types and forerunners of such a power, which should be fully revealed in the latter times, nor is the hated name of antichrist applied by the apostle, by way of anticipation to the false prophets of that time, as possessing much of his character and acting with his spirit. All this appears to me to be totally with-

[1] Ibid. p. 9

out

out foundation in St. John's epiſtles. And yet by much the greater part of this learned prelate's celebrated lectures, is built entirely upon this foundation.

The learned Dr. Benſon, ſpeaking upon this ſubject, ſays, "that the apoſtle John, in uſing this term *antichriſt*, had no reference to the church of Rome. I am (he ſays) well perſuaded that the church of Rome, and the Pope, as the head thereof, is an enemy to Chriſt, and, as ſuch, propheſied of, 2 Theſſ. ii. 1, where he is deſcribed as *the man of ſin*, and he whoſe coming is after the working of Satan; and by this apoſtle, Rev. xvii. in characters no leſs evident: though I cannot find that, in ſcripture, he is any where expreſsly called by the name of *antichriſt*; and in this place, (ch. ii. 22,) St. John does not ſeem to have been propheſying of that corrupt church; but deſcribing *the falſe teachers* who were then ſprung up in the church.[m]"

Mr. Faber, ſpeaking of Mr. Whitaker, ſays, "he appears to me to have exceeded his commiſſion in branding the papacy with the title of antichriſt. Many indeed, and wonderfully explicit are the prophecies which deſcribe the deteſtable cruelties and unholy ſuperſtitions of that great apoſtacy; which teach us the preciſe duration of its perſecuting tyranny, which foretel its union with rebellious infidelity, which point out both the place and manner of its deſtruction. But I have not yet been

[m] See Benſon in loc.

able

able to discover upon what scriptural grounds the name of *antichrist* hath been so generally applied to it. St. John is the only inspired writer who uses the term, and nothing that he says, relative to it, affords us any warrant for conferring it upon the papacy. *He is antichrist that denieth the Father and the Son.* The church of Rome never denied either the Father or the Son; therefore the church of Rome cannot be the antichrist intended by St. John. As for the identity of the little horn of the Roman beast, it seems to me to have been rather taken for granted than proved.[n]"

But let us attend to what St. John has himself said upon the subject, and it will, I think, appear, that the apostle's language, when speaking of antichrist, in ch. ii. 18, has a particular reference to the great controversy between our Lord and the Jews, concerning his being the Messiah. Thus, v. 22, he says—*Who is a liar, but he that denieth that Jesus is* Ο χριστος, *the Christ—or the Messiah? He is* Ο Αντιχριστος, *the antichrist, who denieth the Father and the Son*; for, adds the apostle in the following verse—*Whoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father* founded upon the principle which our Lord himself had laid down, Matt. x. 40. *He that receiveth you, receiveth me. Let that, therefore,* concludes the apostle, *abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning*, concerning the Messiah. And, in the 26th verse, he uses a language which

[n] See Faber on the Prophecies.

has

has so striking a resemblance to that of our Lord, that it can hardly be doubted, that it had a particular reference to it. *These things have I written unto you, concerning them that* would *seduce you,* says St. John. *False Christs and false prophets,* says the Evangelist, *shall rise, to seduce, if it were possible, the very elect.* And, to shew what was the object of those who were endeavouring to seduce them, the apostle, in the 28th verse, says, *and now little children abide in him,* i. e. in Christ, in opposition to the antichrist, or the *many antichrists,* mentioned in the 18th verse, ινα οταν φανερωθη—not, as in our translation, *when he shall appear*; but when *he shall be fully manifested* as such, *we may have confidence in him, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.*

In the ivth chapter, the apostle again resumes the same subject, and expresses himself in such a particular and unequivocal manner as to render it impossible for any one who gives attention to the gospels as histories of the controversy concerning *the true nature of our Lord's character,* to misunderstand him. Ver. 1, *Beloved, believe not every spirit,* or every person, *but try the spirits whether they are of God*; *because,* as he had said before, in ch. ii. 18, *many false prophets are gone out into the world.* But how was this trial to be made? Why, says the apostle, v. 2, εν τουτω γινωσκετε, *by this ye know,* or may *know, the spirit of God*; or rather, as the argument seems to require, *the spirit which is of God: every spirit,* or person, *which confesseth that Jesus Christ is come*

come in the flesh, is of God; *and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God.* The apostle then adds, in the closest connection with these declarations, that they had already been apprized, by what rule they were to be guided in this trial of the spirits. V. 3, *And this is that spirit of antichrist whereof ye have heard that it should come, and even now already is in the world*; agreeably to his declaration, ch. ii. 18, that *they had heard that Antichrist should come, and that even then there were many Antichrists, whereby they knew that it was the last time.* Is it possible not to perceive, that the whole of this language, again and again repeated, has an immediate and direct reference to the controversy concerning *the coming of the Messiah*, and particularly to our Lord's predictions of *the coming of false Christs and false prophets*, who would, *if it were possible, deceive the very elect*, and induce them to follow those who should assume that character? And does not this language, at the same time furnish the fullest proof of the extreme propriety of considering the gospel history as an history of the controversy concerning the true nature of the Messiah's character?

But the apostle has furnished another, and, as appears to me, an unanswerable proof of his genuine meaning, in his cautions which he so particularly connects with his account of the coming of antichrist, and of many antichrists. *Love not the world, neither the things in the world. If any one love the world, the*

the love of the Father is not in him; for all that is in the world, the luſt of the fleſh, and the luſt of the eyes, and the pride of life, are not of the Father, but are of the world. And the world paſſeth away, and the luſt thereof, but he that doth the will of God abideth for ever. In the ivth chapter, the apoſtle ſays, *Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome,* or triumphed over *them,* viz. the falſe prophets, mentioned in the firſt verſe; you have ſeen through and got the better of their artifices; *becauſe greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world, and the world,* for that very reaſon, *heareth them.* They looked for a Meſſiah who ſhould be *a temporal prince,* to raiſe them to the moſt diſtinguiſhed pre-eminence among the nations; and they who ſpoke of the world, in this faſcinating and alluring point of view, were liſtened to with the greateſt avidity. *They ſavoured not,* as our Lord had formerly told his diſciples, *the things of God,* or ſpiritual things, *but thoſe that were of men,* or temporal things. In a word, this language of St. John, appears to have ſo evident, and ſo diſtinct an alluſion to *the worldly views,* which were then generally entertained concerning *the nature of the Meſſiah's character,* that I do not ſee how, upon the ſuppoſition that the Epiſtles are connected with the Goſpels, it is to be underſtood in any other ſenſe.

I am well aware that ſome learned men are of the opinion, that St. John ſpake of the Cerinthians, or of the errors of the Gnoſtics, and of the Docetæ; but

but I ſee no reaſon for entertaining ſuch an opinion. It appears to me infinitely more natural, to ſuppoſe that his language has an excluſive reference to our Lord's predictions. And what he ſays, in the vth chapter, is conceived in a ſtyle that ſeems abſolutely to preclude all doubt, that he had more immediately in view the controverſy between our Lord and the Jews, whether he was ο χριστος, *the Chriſt*, or the Meſſiah. Ver. 1, *Whoſoever believeth that Jeſus is* ο χριστος, *the Chriſt*, or the Meſſiah, *is born of God.* And, in the 4th verſe he ſays, moſt evidently, in alluſion to the worldly views which the Jews had of *the nature of the Meſſiah's character.* Whoſoever is born of God, by believing that Jeſus is the Meſſiah, *overcometh the world:* and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith, or our belief that Jeſus is ο χριστος, the Chriſt, or the Meſſiah. It muſt alſo be obſerved, that it is in this connection that the apoſtle aſks, ver. 5, *Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jeſus is* ο υιος του θεου, *the Son of God?* And, at the cloſe of the chapter, he makes this remarkable declaration, ver. 20, *We know that the Son of God*, the Meſſiah, *is come, and hath given us an underſtanding, that we may know him that is true*, from him who is falſe, or who falſely aſſumes the character of the Son of God: *and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jeſus Chriſt!* What a peculiar propriety and force is there in all this language, if it has a reference to that of our Lord! And how is

it

it poſſible to view it in any other light than as poſſeſſing every internal character of credibility, and, what is more to the purpoſe, as harmonizing moſt exactly with the goſpel hiſtory? In one word, nothing could have been more natural than for the apoſtles to have adopted this language, while the appearance of impoſtors aſſuming *the character of the Meſſiah*, ſeemed to have rendered it ſo particularly neceſſary; for, as has already been obſerved, till that controverſy was finally cloſed by *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, he could not with any propriety have made uſe of any other language. And, to ſuppoſe that this epiſtle was written *after the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, is, I had almoſt ſaid, to be blind to the ſtrongeſt evidence which was ever preſented to the human mind.

As there are ſome paſſages in the two Epiſtles of St. Peter which appear to me to have a relation to *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, though they generally have been differently underſtood, I ſhall preſent my readers with the evidence of their genuine meaning.

The firſt epiſtle of St. Peter has been ſuppoſed, and as appears to me, very properly, to have been addreſſed to Chriſtian converts from among the Gentiles; for, I do not ſee how different parts of this epiſtle, and particularly of the two firſt chapters, can be underſtood without having an excluſive relation to them. Thus, they are ſtyled *elect, according to the foreknowledge of God*, and they are exhorted, *not to*

faſhion

faſhion themſelves according to their former luſts, in their ignorance, that is, in the ſtate of heathen darkneſs, in which they had been involved, prior to their converſion to Chriſtianity. So again, it is ſaid, ſtill more deciſively, that ποτε, formerly, they were *not a people*, but that νυν, *now*, they were *the people of God*; that they *had not obtained mercy*, but that NOW, *they had obtained mercy*. And the deſcription given of them in the ivth chapter, v. 3, will hardly be allowed to be applicable to any other people than to the heathen. *The time paſt of our life may ſuffice to have wrought the will of the* GENTILES, *when we walked in laſciviouſneſs, luſts, exceſs of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries*; which laſt characteriſtic was peculiar to heathens.

But there cannot, perhaps, be a better proof that this epiſtle was written to *Gentile converts*, than the warm and affectionate congratulations with which St. Peter introduces his epiſtle, and his animated deſcription of the ineſtimable value of the bleſſings which had already been conferred upon them; which, as addreſſed TO GENTILES, who knew not God, had not only a peculiar force and propriety in them, but are, as I conceive, at the ſame time, ſtriking proofs of the genuine authenticity of the epiſtle. V. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, *Bleſſed be the God and Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again to a lively hope*, or rather, to a hope of life, *by the reſurrection of Jeſus Chriſt from the dead,*

to an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven, or, as it is in the original, εν ουρανοις, *in the heavens for you, who are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto a salvation* εις σωτηριαν, *ready to be revealed in the laſt time.* Εν ω *In* the proſpect of *which, ye greatly rejoice, though, now, for a ſhort time, if need be,* or ſeeing, from the circumſtances of the times, that it is neceſſary, *ye are in heavineſs through manifold temptations, that the trial of your faith* in this ſalvation, *being much more valuable than the trial of gold, that periſheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praiſe, and honour, and glory at the appearing,* or rather, as, εν αποκαλυψει, properly ſignifies, *at the revelation of Jeſus Chriſt.*

Moſt commentators are of opinion, that *the ſalvation ready to be revealed, in the laſt time,* in the 5th verſe, and *the revelation of Jeſus Chriſt,* at the cloſe of the 7th verſe, relate to the final and everlaſting ſalvation of mankind in a future ſtate. But the courſe of the apoſtle's argument appears to me, to require theſe expreſſions to be underſtood of *the ſalvation* to which the Gentiles, as *a people,* were about to be introduced, by the full revelation of the true nature and deſign of *the coming of the Meſſiah,* by *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem,* when *the wall of partition* between Jew and Gentile *would be broken down,* and, as this apoſtle, in his ſecond epiſtle, has expreſſed it, *ſo η εισοδος,* the way, or *entrance, would be abundantly enlarged into the everlaſting*

laſting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt.

It ſeems hardly poſſible, to put any other ſenſe upon what the apoſtle ſays, in the 10th and following verſes, namely, that it was, *of this ſalvation* that *the prophets enquired and ſearched diligently, who propheſied of the grace*, or favour, *that was to come unto them*; for the term, *grace*, or favour, moſt unqueſtionably, has an alluſion to *the ſalvation* which was *ready to be revealed.* But this is not all; for, the apoſtle goes on and ſays, v. 11. that *the prophets ſearched*, εις τινα, to whom, or to what time, *the ſpirit of Chriſt, which was in them, related, when it teſtified beforehand the ſufferings of Chriſt, and the glory that ſhould follow* thoſe ſufferings. *Unto whom it was revealed, that, not unto themſelves, as Jews, but unto you*, Gentiles, *they did miniſter the things which are now reported unto you, by them that have preached the goſpel unto you, with the Holy Ghoſt ſent down from heaven; which things the angels deſire to look into.*

This laſt expreſſion is a very remarkable one; and, if I conjecture right, not only ſtrongly confirms the preceding interpretation, but is deſerving of very particular attention, as it ſeems to me to allude to *a fact*, which makes a very conſpicuous figure in the hiſtory of the Acts of the Apoſtles, and in the hiſtory too of St. Peter himſelf. From this hiſtory, it appears, that nothing could have been further from the thoughts of every Jew, than

that the Gentiles ſhould be partakers of the privileges and bleſſings of *the Meſſiah's kingdom*; and St. Peter was ſo fully confirmed in the general opinion, that he even thought it *unlawful to keep company with, or to go to one of another nation.* And nothing, it appears, could overcome this reluctance to have any communication with the Gentiles, but a particular revelation from *heaven* of the favour which was to be extended to the Gentile world. *What was I, that I ſhould withſtand God?* When, therefore, the apoſtle, ſpeaking of *the call of the Gentiles*, ſays, *which things the angels*, or meſſengers *deſire to look into*, he appears to me, evidently to allude to the aſtoniſhment, which this meaſure of divine providence produced upon the minds of the apoſtles, in general, as well as upon himſelf in particular.

But there is ſtill further, and, as I conceive, ſtronger evidence what St. Peter means, by *the appearing*, or revelation *of Jeſus Chriſt*, for St. Luke, when ſpeaking of *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, makes uſe, preciſely, of the ſame words with St. Peter, chap. xvii. 28. 30. *As it was in the days of Lot, even thus ſhall it be when the Son of Man,* αποκαλυπτεται, *is revealed*°, i. e. when it will fully appear that the great object of *the coming of the Meſſiah* was, not as the Jews imagined, exclu-

° That this paſſage and the whole of the connection from the 19th verſe relates, excluſively, to *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, ſee the Triumphs of Chriſtianity, p. 131 to 140.

ſively

ſively to benefit themſelves, by raiſing them to an univerſal empire over the whole world, but to include within his benevolent views, the whole race of mankind, *Gentiles* as well as *Jews*.

The apoſtle having thus aſſerted that *the call of the Gentiles* was clearly foreſeen and foretold by the ancient prophets, and having led them to expect the complete fulfilment of theſe prophecies, he very pertinently founds upon it an important and peculiarly appropriate admonition. Ver. 13. *Wherefore gird up the loins of your minds, be ſober, and hope to the end*; that is, entertain a firm confidence of the *grace*, or favour, *which is about to be brought to you Gentiles*, as a nation εν αποκαλυψει, *at the revelation of Jeſus Chriſt*.

There is ſomething extremely natural, in the apoſtle's congratulating the converts to Chriſtianity, upon their being made partakers of its privileges and bleſſings, and in his telling them, that the time was near approaching, when theſe good tidings, which had been the ſubject of antient prophecy, would have a more extended and a wider influence upon the Gentile world. A more pleaſing ſubject could hardly have occupied the attention of an apoſtle, who was now completely diveſted of his prejudices! Nor is there, I am bold to ſay, in the annals of antiquity, a ſtronger proof of the authenticity of a letter written under the circumſtances of thoſe times, than this chapter preſents to our view. It muſt have been impoſſible for an

apoſtle, impreſſed as St. Peter was, with the ineſtimable value of the benefits to be conferred upon the Gentile world, not to have adopted ſuch a language!

Having, as I conceive, in the former part of this work, when controverting the preſent Biſhop of London's opinion, concerning the deſign of the transfiguration, given an accurate repreſentation of the genuine meaning of St. Peter, when he aſſerted, 2 Ep. i. 16, *We have not followed cunningly deviſed fables, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt,* and of the ſubſequent context, I ſhall not repeat it here, but proceed to the conſideration of the ſecond chapter; the principal object of which, appears to have been, to guard thoſe to whom he wrote, againſt falſe prophets and falſe teachers, who would ariſe among them, as our Lord had expreſsly predicted, to ſeduce them from the truth, and particularly from the true doctrine, concerning *the coming of Chriſt.* V. 1, *But there were falſe prophets among the people, even as there ſhall be falſe teachers among you, who privily ſhall bring in,* αιρεσεις απωλειας, *deſtructive hereſies, denying the Lord that bought them, bringing upon themſelves ſwift deſtruction. And many ſhall follow their pernicious ways, by reaſon of whom, the way of truth ſhall be evil ſpoken of. And through covetouſneſs ſhall they, with feigned words, make merchandize of you; whoſe judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their deſtruction ſlumbereth not.*

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The character of these false teachers, the apostle describes, at full length, in the subsequent part of the chapter; and that his great object, in thus particularly describing them, might not be mistaken, he, in the following chapter, acquaints them with what was his principal design in both his epistles. V. 1, *This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you* εν αις, *in both which I stir up your pure minds, by way of remembrance, that ye may be mindful of the words which were formerly spoken by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour; knowing this first, that there shall come, in the last days, scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming; for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation?*

The apostle having asserted that, in both his epistles, his great object was, that they should *be mindful of the words which were formerly spoken by the holy prophets*, has, I think, clearly directed us how to understand the language of the scoffers, when they said, *Where is the promise of his coming?* for, in his first epistle, ch. i. 10, he tells those to whom he wrote, that *the prophets had prophesied of the grace*, or favour, *that was about to be bestowed upon the Gentiles.* He speaks also of a *salvation that was ready to be revealed*, and of *the revelation of Jesus Christ.* And, in his second epistle, he says, *the entrance*, or way, *was about to be abundantly enlarged into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and*

Saviour Jeſus Chriſt. And in this connection, he ſays, *We have not followed cunningly deviſed fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*, at the ſame time declaring, that *the word of prophecy* concerning his coming, *was more fully confirmed, by the ſigns* which were then appearing, *to which they did well to take heed as to a light ſhining in a dark place until the day dawn, and the day ſtar,* [P] *or the ſun, ariſe upon your hearts.*

In all theſe places, the apoſtle appears to me to allude to *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, which was to open a way to the Gentiles participating in all the privileges and bleſſings of the Meſſiah's kingdom. In the chapter under conſideration, the apoſtle uſes the phraſe which he had adopted in the firſt chapter of this epiſtle, where, he had aſſerted, that the apoſtles *had not followed cunningly deviſed fables when they made known the power and coming of the Lord Jeſus.* Here, he ſays, ſcoffers aroſe, in oppoſition, and ſaid, *Where is the promiſe of his coming?* And the reaſon they gave for their ſcoffs, was, that *all things continued as they were from the beginning of the creation.* And when we combine the whole of what the apoſtle has ſaid in his two epiſtles, with what our Lord himſelf had ſaid, concerning *the deſtruction*

[P] Dr. Benſon has obſerved that, φωσφορος does commonly ſignify *the morning ſtar*, which is called Lucifer, or Venus. But Suidas ſays, it ſometimes ſignifies *the ſun*, whoſe part it is φως φορειν, *to bring in the light.* And, accordingly, the Syriac hath here tranſlated it, *the ſun.* See Benſon in loc.

of Jeruſalem, which had not yet taken place, I do not ſee how, upon the principles of ſound criticiſm and juſt reaſoning, the apoſtle's language can be otherwiſe applied, than to the controverſy concerning *the coming of the Meſſiah*.

But beſides this, there is, I think, other evidence, in the ſubſequent part of the chapter, that this was the apoſtle's genuine meaning; for, in the ſeventh verſe, the apoſtle ſays, *the heavens which are now, by the ſame word of prophecy*, mentioned in the former epiſtle, *are kept in ſtore, reſerved unto fire againſt the day of judgment and deſtruction*, απωλειας, *of ungodly men*. And in the tenth verſe, it is remarkable, that the apoſtle uſes the very ſame language adopted by St. Paul, from the antient prophecies deſcriptive of *temporal calamities*, in 1 Theſſ. v. 2. *The day of the Lord will ſo come as a thief in the night, in which* day, *the heavens ſhall paſs away with a great noiſe, and the elements ſhall melt with fervent heat, the earth alſo, and the works that are therein ſhall be burnt up*. This language will probably receive a preciſe and determinate ſignification, if it is compared with what the writer of the epiſtle to the Hebrews has made uſe of; for he expreſsly ſays, that *the ſhaking of the earth and the heavens, ſignifies the removing of thoſe things that are ſhaken; that thoſe things which cannot be ſhaken may remain*. And it was a very ſtriking part of our Lord's prediction of *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, that *the powers of the heavens ſhould be ſhaken*. Upon our Lord's

Lord's prediction, therefore, the apoſtle ſeems to ground the following declaration, v. 13, *We, according to his promiſe, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteouſneſs*; and, upon this expectation he makes a moſt appropriate practical exhortation; *Wherefore, beloved, ſeeing that ye look for theſe things*, that is, for the new heavens and the new earth, *be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without ſpot and blameleſs, and account that the long-ſuffering of our Lord is ſalvation, even as our beloved brother Paul alſo, according to the wiſdom given unto him, hath written unto you. As alſo, in all his epiſtles, ſpeaking of theſe things, in which ſome things are hard to be underſtood, which they that are* ἀμαθεῖς, *uninſtructed and unſtable, wreſt, as they do alſo the other ſcriptures to their own deſtruction.*

If I do not very much miſtake, there is, in this alluſion to St. Paul's epiſtles, very ſtriking evidence of the genuine meaning of St. Peter, in the chapter under conſideration; for it is expreſsly aſſerted by St. Peter, whatever he is treating of, that St. Paul, in his epiſtles, treats of the ſame. In all *his epiſtles ſpeaking in them of theſe things.* The apoſtle adds, *in which are ſome things hard to be underſtood.* It has been a matter of ſome trouble to commentators to comprehend what the things were which St. Paul's epiſtles contained, that were ſo hard to be underſtood. Dr. Benſon has mentioned Beza, as aſſerting, that St. Peter has ſaid more things, and more obſcure things, concerning *the*

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laſt day, than Paul has done in any part of his epiſtles. And he himſelf ſays, he does not find that St. Paul has ſaid any thing remarkably obſcure or difficult in what he has ſaid about *the laſt day*, or about the other particulars which St. Peter has here treated of.

But theſe difficulties, ſo perplexing to Dr. Benſon, would immediately vaniſh, if by *the things hard to be underſtood*, in St. Paul's epiſtles, be meant *the diſſolution of the Hebrew ſtate*, the *rejection of the Jews*, and the *admiſſion of the Gentiles to the participation of the bleſſings of the Meſſiah's kingdom*; for theſe were ſubjects of which St. Paul frequently treated, and very hard indeed were they to be underſtood by the Jews! And that St. Peter referred to the apoſtle Paul's treating upon theſe ſubjects, appears to me extremely evident from his ſpeaking of them in the cloſeſt connection with the *coming of Chriſt*, the *diſſolution of the heavens and the earth*, and the *looking for new heavens, and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteouſneſs*.

When St. Peter further ſays, that *the* αμαθεις, the *uninſtructed, and the* αστηρικτοι, the *unſtable, wreſted* theſe hard things to *their own deſtruction, as they did alſo the other ſcriptures*; the hiſtory of the Jewiſh nation, as preſented to us in the goſpel hiſtory, and particularly in the hiſtory of the Acts of the Apoſtles, give the fulleſt ſanction to his aſſertion. They wreſted the prophecies concerning the coming of their Meſſiah to their proud and ambitious

ambitious views of aggrandizement, and to their expectation of obtaining, under his auſpices, an univerſal empire over the whole world. And, becauſe he laid no claim to any ſuch character, they rejected and crucified him, as a notorious malefactor and impoſtor. They would not attend to the awful warnings, that God was about to forſake them, and they were inflamed, even to madneſs, when St. Paul ſpoke of going to the Gentiles to make them the offers of ſalvation. *Away with ſuch a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he ſhould live.* They perſecuted, with unrelenting fury, all who ventured to ſpeak to the Gentiles upon this ſubject, and, at length, brought on themſelves the ruin with which they had been threatened.

I have thus faithfully endeavoured to aſcertain the genuine meaning of the apoſtle Peter; whether I have ſucceeded, my readers muſt judge; but I feel much gratified in preſenting the ſentiments of the learned Dr. Lightfoot, upon this ſubject, whom Mr. Maltby mentions, as throwing more light upon the language and alluſions of the ſacred volumes, than almoſt all other commentators whatſoever.[q] Speaking of *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, he ſays, "It is ſet forth in ſuch expreſſions as if it were *the deſtruction of the whole*

[q] I think it neceſſary to inform my readers, that I have taken ſome ſlight liberties with Dr. Lightfoot's language; but for the ſenſe, I pledge myſelf, not to have miſrepreſented it.

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world. Moſes begins this ſtyle in Deut. xxxii. 22, where he is ſpeaking of that vengeance. *A fire is kindled in mine anger, and it ſhall burn to the loweſt hell, and it ſhall conſume the earth with her increaſe, and ſet on fire the foundations of the mountains.* So again, Jer. iv. 23, *I beheld the earth, and lo, it was without form and void: and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and they trembled. I beheld, and there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled.* In both theſe inſtances, it might be imagined, that the whole univerſe were diſſolving; yet, in the former, the connection plainly ſhows it to mean *the deſtruction of the Jewiſh nation.* And in the latter, it is expreſsly ſaid, *the whole land ſhall be deſolate.*

In the New Teſtament, our Lord ſpeaks a yet ſtronger language, Matt. xxiv. 29. *The ſun ſhall be darkened and the moon ſhall not give her light, and the ſtars ſhall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens ſhall be ſhaken, and then ſhall appear the ſign of the Son of Man in heaven.* Who would not conclude that theſe expreſſions mean, the diſſolution of the world, and Chriſt's coming to *judgment?* yet the context ſhews plainly, that this language is meant only of *the diſſolution of the Jewiſh ſtate*; which our Lord expreſſes, ſtill more plainly, when he ſays, v. 34, *This generation ſhall not paſs away till all theſe things be fulfilled.* In the ſixth chapter of the Revelations, St. John follows his maſter's ſtyle upon the very ſame ſubject; for, after having deſcribed

deſcribed the means of the deſtruction of this wretched people, by ſword, famine, and plague, he, in the 12th and following verſes, mentions their diſſolution itſelf in ſimilar terms. *The ſun became black as ſackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood, and the ſtars of heaven fell to the earth, and the heavens departed as a ſcroll that is rolled together, and every mountain and iſland were removed out of their places.* Here, again, *the final diſſolution of the whole world* ſeems to be ſpoken of; but, in the 16th verſe, the very ſame words are applied to *the deſtruction of that very people*, by our Lord, in St. Luke, ch. xxiii. 30. *They ſaid unto the mountains, fall on us and hide us.* St. Peter's meaning therefore, when he ſpeaks of *the heavens being diſſolved by fire, and the works that are therein, &c.* Dr. Lightfoot concludes, appears only to have been, that *the Jewiſh church and ſtate were to be diſſolved* by the juſt vengeance of God.

I cannot refrain from preſenting to the reader what this learned writer has farther ſaid, upon the general phraſeology of the New Teſtament, as it coincides, moſt exactly, with my own ideas upon the ſubject. "As the deſtruction of the old world, or of the Jewiſh economy, is deſcribed by ſuch expreſſions as if it was *the deſtruction of the univerſe*; ſo," he ſays, "the times going before, and connected with, *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, are likewiſe deſcribed by expreſſions equally ſuitable. Thus, frequent mention is made in ſcripture, of *the laſt days*,

days, which are not to be underſtood of *the laſt days of the world*, but *of the Jewiſh ſtate*. The greateſt mercies were promiſed to take place in *theſe laſt days*, and the worſt of men and times are predicted of them, becauſe they did not improve them. In a ſimilar ſenſe are ſuch phraſes as theſe to be underſtood. *Upon whom the ends of the world are come*; *the end of all things is at hand*; meaning in both caſes, not *the end of the world*, in the ſtrict ſenſe of that expreſſion, but *the end of the Jewiſh church and ſtate*. Again, the vengeance of Chriſt, upon that people, in their final deſtruction, is called, *his coming*, *his coming in his kingdom*, *his coming in clouds*, and *with power and great glory*: nor is this language merely figurative; for our Lord had himſelf ſaid, *This generation ſhall not paſs away till all theſe things be fulfilled*. Accordingly, the day of that vengeance is called, *the day of the Lord*. Once more, the ſtate of the Chriſtian church, after the diſſolution of the Jewiſh economy, is ſometimes called *the world to come*, ſometimes *new heavens and a new earth*, and ſometimes, *all things new*; from all which it appears, that St. Peter ſpeaks of *the diſſolution of the Jewiſh church and ſtate*, in ſuch terms, as the ſcripture uſes to expreſs it by, as if it were *the diſſolution of the whole world*.[r]"

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[r] See Dr. Lightfoot's Sermon on 2 Pet. iii. 13. in his works, vol. ii. p. 1078-4.

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I have now conducted my readers, or rather suffered myself to be conducted, through a large portion of the gospel history, and of the apostolic epistles, upon the uncontrovertible principle, that the former is an history of the controversy between our Lord and the Jews concerning the true nature of the Messiah's character, and that the latter could not have been silent upon the subject while that controversy remained at issue; that is, while the predictions of our Lord, concerning *the destruction of Jerusalem* were *unfulfilled*. The success of my inquiries, upon this principle, has in my own opinion, at least, been very satisfactory; but whether my readers will think with me must be left to time

In the prophecy of Isaiah, there is the following remarkable passage, which particularly claims the reader's attention, ch. lxv. 2, &c. *Ye are they that forsake the Lord, that forget my holy mountain. Therefore will I number you to the sword, and ye shall bow down to the slaughter. Behold my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow and howl for vexation of spirit, and ye shall leave your name for a curse to my chosen; for the Lord God shall slay thee, and call his servants by another name; for behold I create new heavens and a new earth.*

It will, I think, be impossible to read this passage without being convinced, that it relates to the destruction of Jerusalem and the call of the Gentiles. Besides the wickedness which is said to be the cause of their calamities, their leaving their name for a curse, and his servants being called by *another* name, are extremely remarkable, and can hardly be applied to any other event than to the establishment of *the Christian name*. And *the creating new heavens and a new earth*, is the very language of the apostle Peter.

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to determine. It will readily be diſcerned, that I had an hypotheſis to ſupport, but that hypotheſis being invulnerable, there ſeems to have been leſs danger of taking unjuſtifiable methods of defending it. If I have, I moſt earneſtly intreat, that the lovers of truth will come forward to expoſe it; for I know of nothing that would afford me greater pleaſure than to ſee truth triumphant, whatever may be the conſequences to myſelf. From the number of years that this ſubject has occupied my attention, and from the manner in which I have treated it, or thoſe who have differed from me, I feel no apprehenſions of thoſe conſequences, but rather conceive myſelf entitled to the approbation of all the friends of Chriſtianity. I have however, heretofore been too ſanguine upon the ſubject, and it would, perhaps, be more becoming in me to wait in ſilence for the public opinion. But be that as it may, I cannot conclude without making a few obſervations.

The firſt obſervation that I ſhall make, is, that if the goſpel hiſtory be an hiſtory of the controverſy between our Lord and the Jews, concerning *the true nature of the Meſſiah's character*, there is, incomparably more evidence of the truth of that hiſtory, than of any of the moſt celebrated writings of antiquity. Every page of the goſpels contains the moſt ſtriking marks of this controverſy, and almoſt every letter of the apoſtles, is a ſtrong confirmation of their having conſidered them as hiſtories

of that controverſy. From hence, I think, I am warranted in this concluſion, that the miracles which are recorded in it, are deſerving of the fulleſt credit. If theſe miracles had been recorded in an hiſtory, which had been deficient in the internal evidence of its authenticity, they would, in my humble opinion, have been deſerving of no regard! But we have teſtimony the moſt reſpectable, and evidence the moſt unqueſtionable, that at the time of our Lord's appearance, the whole Jewiſh nation expected a perſon under *the character of their Meſſiah*, and that throughout the whole goſpel hiſtory, and the whole period ſubſequent to the death of Chriſt to *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, they uniformly acted under the influence of that expectation, though under an erroneous idea, that he was to be *a temporal prince*, to conduct them to conqueſt, and to an univerſal empire over the whole world. We have evidence too throughout the whole courſe of that hiſtory, that our Lord and his apoſtles conducted themſelves in the manner, which, from the nature of their ſeveral ſituations might, á priori, have been expected, and that, in fact, the former could not have acted otherwiſe than he did, without effectually defeating the great purpoſes of his miſſion. This, I repeat, gives a credibility to the miraculous part of the goſpel hiſtory, which it would otherwiſe want. In fact, if the miracles of the goſpel, blended as they are with every page of the goſpel hiſtory, were not wrought, Chriſtianity

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is the greateſt and moſt execrable impoſture that ever exiſted!

The late Sir William Jones, whoſe great attainments have deſervedly placed him in the higheſt rank of intellectual eminence, after poſſeſſing himſelf of all that the ſages and philoſophers of all times have ſaid upon the works of nature, has made the following obſervations upon the records of our religion, which the preceding work, ſo far as they regard the New Teſtament, will be found amply to juſtify. "I have," he ſays, "regularly and attentively read theſe holy ſcriptures, and am of opinion, that this volume, independently of its divine origin, contains more true ſublimity, more exquiſite beauty, more pure morality, more important hiſtory, and finer ſtrains both of poetry and eloquence, than can be collected from all other books, in whatever age or language they may have been compoſed. The two parts of which the ſcriptures conſiſt, are connected by a chain of compoſitions, which bear no reſemblance, in form or ſtyle, to any that can be produced from the ſtores of *Grecian*, *Perſian*, or even *Arabian* learning: the antiquity of theſe compoſitions no man doubts; and the *unſtrained application* of them to events *long ſubſequent* to their *publication*, is a ſolid ground of belief that they are *genuine productions*, and conſequently inſpired."[*]

[*] See Aſiatic Reſearches, vol. iii. p. 8, 9.

The value of this teſtimony of Sir William Jones to the evidence and excellence of the ſcriptures, is greatly enhanced by a remark which he makes in another part of his writings, viz. "That his teſtimony on this ſubject, ought to have the greater weight, becauſe, if the reſult of his obſervations had been totally different, he ſhould nevertheleſs have publiſhed them; not, indeed, with equal pleaſure, but with equal confidence; for truth is mighty, and whatſoever be its conſequences, muſt always prevail."[t]

Another obſervation, which I wiſh ſtrongly to impreſs upon my readers is, that theſe ſcriptures, ſo confeſſedly excellent and full of evidence, to have full juſtice done them, ought to be ſtudied with a ſtrict regard to the ſober rules of genuine criticiſm and juſt reaſoning, and that both the goſpels and epiſtles ſhould be conſidered as having a ſpecial relation to the controverſy between our Lord and the Jews concerning *the true nature of the Meſſiah's character*. A view to this controverſy, moſt unqueſtionably, is eſſential to the right underſtanding of the New Teſtament. For the truth and importance of this obſervation, I dare venture to appeal to the xxivth of Matthew, and the parallel chapters to the fifth chapter of the 1ſt and the ſecond of the 2d epiſtle to the Theſſalonians, to the two firſt epiſtles of St. John, and to both the epiſtles of St.

[t] Ib. vol. iv. p. 3, 4.

Peter;

Peter; in all which, a regard to this controverſy has tended materially to elucidate the deſign of the writers. The ſame may be ſaid of particular paſſages which have been involved in ſo much obſcurity as to lay a foundation for the objection that our Lord foretold *his ſecond coming*, to judge all mankind in the generation in which he lived; ſuch as when he ſaid, that his apoſtles *ſhould not have gone over the cities of Jeruſalem before the Son of Man came*, and that *there were ſome then living who ſhould not taſte of death, till they ſaw the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

Some writers, and thoſe of no mean conſideration in the Chriſtian world, in their interpretation of the xxivth of Matthew, and the parallel chapters, have had recourſe to types and double meanings, whereby they have greatly diſfigured, if not corrupted, the ſimplicity of the narratives, and at the ſame time deprived themſelves of the very important advantages which they otherwiſe would obviouſly have held forth, of clearing the ſenſe of ſome of the obſcureſt parts of the apoſtolic epiſtles. They have, indeed, appealed to theſe chapters for the proof of their interpretations, but in ſo doing, they have manifeſted ſomething like diſingenuouſneſs, in dropping the diſtinction they had made between the primary and ſecondary ſenſes, and in taking it for granted, that it was not *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, but *the day of Judgment*, that was the ſubject of thoſe chapters, though they had allowed that

they referred primarily to the former of these events.

I have been at considerable pains, to ascertain the genuine meaning of these chapters, and have offered what appears to me to be unanswerable proofs, that they relate, exclusively, to *the destruction of Jerusalem*. My reasonings upon those parts of the epistles, which have fallen under my notice, have been conducted upon this exclusive meaning. And, if those reasonings have led to a right understanding of those passages, the fact, that the evangelists referred *exclusively* to that event, will, I think, be established beyond all reasonable doubt. In fact, to do justice to the sacred writings, all double meanings and secondary senses must, in my opinion, be discarded, and the gospel history must be studied with a close attention to the peculiar circumstances of the times, and to the controversy which was then on foot, between our Lord and the Jews, *concerning the true nature of the Messiah's character*.

What the issue of an inquiry, conducted upon these principles, may be, it is impossible for me to say; but I think I may venture to predict, that it will contribute much towards removing the odium with which commentators have been loaded, and I fear justly loaded, by Bishop Newton in the following remarkable passage, "Many a text of scripture," he says, "seemeth plain enough to a man upon his reading it by himself, and comparing it with the context; but upon consulting the tribe

tribe of paraphraſts and annotators, he ſcarce knoweth what to think; and inſtead of that one genuine ſenſe, which he conceived, he hath ten or twenty ſenſes, or rather no ſenſe at all. Commentors are a kind of neceſſary evils; there is no doing well without them or with them."

My opinion perfectly coincides with that of the preſent Biſhop of Llandaff, that "the moſt critical ſcrutiny into the foundations of our faith, will be a confirmation of its truth, and that the time is approaching, or is already come, when Chriſtianity will undergo a more ſevere inveſtigation than it has ever yet done." His expectation, as to the iſſue, is this, "that catholic countries will become proteſtant, and that proteſtant countries will admit a further reformation." And I muſt beg leave to add my further opinion, that there are no human means ſo likely to produce an iſſue ſo deſirable, as the ſtudying the ſcriptures, upon the principles which, in the preceding work, I have moſt cloſely, and I truſt impartially, adhered to. That they have not heretofore been ſo ſtudied, muſt be lamented by every friend of Chriſtianity, and by none more than myſelf, as I am perſuaded, I ſhould have been ſaved the anxious and laborious purſuits, which have ſo long occupied my attention. I can now, however, ſay, from a large ſhare of experience, without detracting from the uſe of other ſources of information, that ſcripture is infinitely the beſt interpreter of ſcripture, and, if a

proper uſe is made of it, that it will ultimately lead to the happieſt conſequences to mankind.

Another obſervation, naturally ariſing from the preceding view, is, that it eſtabliſhes a moſt delightful harmony between the epiſtles and goſpels; an harmony, which, at the ſame time, in the ſtrongeſt manner confirms the authenticity of the whole. Our Lord began his miniſtry, by declaring, that *the kingdom of heaven*, or of the Meſſiah, *was at hand*. To prove this important fact, was *the primary object* of all his labours and of all his inſtructions. Upon the four great occaſions, particularly when he gave his diſciples a commiſſion to announce *the near approach of that kingdom*; when he foretold *his own ſufferings and death*; when he predicted *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*; and when he was *arraigned, tried, and condemned, as a notorious malefactor and impoſtor, for aſſuming the character of the Meſſiah*, he renewed the aſſurance of *its near approach*, ſaying, that his diſciples *ſhould not have gone over the cities of Iſrael*, in the execution of the duties of their miſſion, *before the Son of Man came*; that there were *ſome then living, who ſhould not taſte of death till they ſaw the Son of Man coming in his kingdom*; that as *they knew, by the budding of the trees, that ſummer was near*, ſo they would, as certainly know, by the ſigns of the approaching deſtruction of Jeruſalem, that *the kingdom of heaven was nigh, even at the doors*; and that, from the time of his crucifixion, they *ſhould ſee the Son of Man ſitting on the*

the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven, i. e. manifeſting the true nature and deſign of his coming, in *the deſtruction*, not in the increaſed proſperity, of the Jewiſh nation!

In the epiſtles, the apoſtles, with a particular view to the event, which was to be the final proof of the eſtabliſhment of the Meſſiah's kingdom, ſpeak of *the Lord being at hand*, of *the coming of the Lord drawing nigh*, and of *the coming of Chriſt*; phraſes peculiarly adapted to expreſs *the near approach of the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*. And though it will readily be allowed, that there is a degree of ambiguity in theſe phraſes, yet, that very ambiguity will be conſidered by all who attend to *the nature of the ſubject* to which they relate, as no ſlight proof that the apoſtles had that awful event in their view.[u] In ſome of the epiſtles where theſe

[u] Our own times have, I think, furniſhed a very ſtriking inſtance of the extreme propriety, and even the abſolute neceſſity of the apoſtles conducting themſelves in the very cautious manner, which the peculiarity of their ſituation required. The noted Mr. Brothers, whether from political views, or from a mental derangement, is immaterial, predicted great calamities, as about to happen to this country, in a language which could not be miſunderſtood. When his predictions became the ſubject of much attention, nothing can be more obvious, than that they, very properly, attracted the notice of Government; for no Government can, with ſafety, be inattentive to matters of this nature. If, therefore, the apoſtles had not uſed the language of caution, in ſpeaking of the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, impriſonment, or a violent death, would, in all probability, have been the conſequence.

phraſes

phraſes occur, there is ſo clear and diſtinct a reference to the controverſy concerning *the coming of Chriſt*, particularly in the two firſt epiſtles of St. John, and in the firſt and third chapters of the ſecond epiſtle of St. Peter, that I do not ſee how it is to be denied, without reſiſting the ſtrongeſt evidence! And, even in the ſecond chapter of the ſecond epiſtle to the Theſſalonians, there is ſuch a ſtriking reſemblance of language to that of our Lord in his prediction of the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, and the whole tenor of his deſcription applies ſo exactly to the Jews, that both together form a ſtrong preſumption, that the apoſtle alludes to them. And it may, I think, be ſafely left to the reader to determine, whether greater advantage can accrue to the Chriſtian religion by the application of St. Paul's language to the church of Rome, than to the Jews, the latter being intimately connected with the accompliſhment of our Lord's prediction of *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*! *

A

* It has been obſerved by Mr. Zouch, that the titles of the man of ſin, the ſon of perdition, the lawleſs one, have been given to different perſonages; to the leaders of the factious Jews, who revolted from the Romans, before the deſtruction of Jeruſalem; to Caius Caligula, a mercileſs tyrant; to the emperor Titus, the delight of mankind; to Simon Magus; to the Gnoſtics; to Mahomet; nay, to the bright luminaries of the reformation, John Wicliff and Martin Luther"

Mr. Jones and the late Biſhop of St. Aſaph, to both whoſe opinions Mr. Kett has given his approbation, have applied them

A fifth obſervation that I ſhall trouble my readers with is, that it is impoſſible to be fully ſenſible of the value of Chriſtianity, without paying particular attention to the circumſtances of the times, when it was firſt publiſhed. Some idea is given us, in our Lord's ſermon upon the mount, of the groſs corruptions of the eſſential laws of morality, by the Jewiſh nation, and it was evidently the deſign of his miſſion in general, and of that ſermon in particular, to correct thoſe corruptions. But the prophecy of Iſaiah deſcribes our Lord as given εις φως εθνων, *for a light to the Gentiles*, and he ſtyles himſelf as, το φως του κοσμου, *the light of the world.*

"No candid mind," ſays a very able writer, "can deſire, and no ingenuity could deviſe, a more convincing demonſtration of the truth of the goſpel, than the ſuperlative pre-eminence of the morality of the goſpel above the doctrines of Gentile philoſophy, and the deductions of what is uſually called, *natural religion.* The precepts of Chriſtianity, reſpecting the regu-

them to more modern times; but, as appears to me, without foundation. It is a fine obſervation of Mr. Zouch, that "the ſyſtem of prophecy is not vague or uncertain, that it ſeldom derives any elucidation from the propoſal of haſty conjectures. The events which conſtitute its completion, flow along the ſtream of time, in a regular and uninterrupted ſucceſſion. Predicted revolutions, which are yet future, will, in due courſe, be ſo decidedly fulfilled, as to leave no room for ſcepticiſm itſelf to fluctuate in ſuſpenſe." See Mr. Zouch's Attempt, p. 18, 19. How ſtrikingly was this the caſe in our Lord's prediction of *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem!*

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lation of our lives in every branch of duty, not only excel in ſublimity of ſentiment, and in ſuitableneſs to this proper end, the refinement of the heart, and the exaltation of the human character, to the higheſt point attainable by rational intelligence; not only excel, I ſay, in theſe reſpects, the morality of any ſingle philoſopher of antiquity, but the concentrated wiſdom of every moraliſt and philoſopher, of every age and nation. This, ſurely, is a prodigious conſideration, and conſtitutes an irreſiſtible force of evidence. At the ſame time, there is no hazard, no raſhneſs, in this aſſertion; no fear of incurring an imputation of groundleſs confidence, or childiſh partiality. The field is open to the unbeliever; the diligence and wit of ages have been employed in furniſhing him with armour for the combat: the challenge is made in form, and the conteſt is capable of deciſion. But, it were in vain to expect from him, an open engagement on ſuch unequal terms. He knows too well, that *our Galilean* has brought down from the ſkies what Socrates, inferior only to the Galilean, wiſhed for, but wiſhed in vain.

"But, one fallacy, which has probably miſled the underſtandings of many on this ſubject, muſt not be paſſed by, undetected. Produce me the man, who can juſtly claim a ſuperiority in native endowments, and the accompliſhments of learning to the Plato's, the Ariſtotles, the Zenophons, the Tullys of Greece and Rome. Is that within the compaſs

paſs of his intellect, which theſe heroes were unable to attain? To form a true judgment, therefore, of the powers of unaſſiſted reaſon, and the progreſs of *natural religion*, we ought to recur to thoſe ſyſtems of morality, which exiſted *before* the birth of Chriſtianity. *They alone* are the reaſonable ſpecimens of thoſe powers, the genuine proof of that progreſs. The various ſchemes of moral philoſophy, which have been derived, or rather drawn up, beneath the ſunſhine of the goſpel, have received too much illumination from that ſource, to paſs, with conſiderate examiners, for a proper teſt of the abilities of man, unaided by revelation. Educated under thoſe benign influences, which Chriſtianity has exerted on life and manners, we have imperceptibly imbibed a portion of its vivifying ſpirit, and eaſily miſtake that for an effulgence of native light, which is but a reflection of a brighter luminary, unobſerved from a long familiarity with its effects.

"The fountain of living waters, firſt flowed indeed only in Judea, but has ſince diſperſed rivulets of health and vigour through every region of the univerſe. Nay, further, the purer morality of the later Grecian ſchools, and the ſtriking ſuperiority in the theories of modern times, over the old philoſophers, afford of themſelves an incontrovertible proof, that the waters of Iſrael far tranſcend in ſalutary virtues, all the rivers of Damaſcus." [y]

y See Wakefield's Internal Evidences of the Excellence of Chriſtianity, p. 12, &c.

I ſhall only add, to what this writer has ſo well ſaid of the ſuperior excellence of the Chriſtian morality, that it embraces *whatſever things are true, honeſt, juſt, pure, lovely, and of good report, teaching men to deny ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, and to live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this world*, and to direct all their actions by the ſublime principles of love to God and man. And what conſtitutes the principal glory of this morality is, that it carries along with it a proviſion for the weakneſſes and frailties of human nature in the performance of the duties of it. Chriſtianity is, in this reſpect, peculiarly το ευαγγελιον, *the goſpel*, or good news of pardon and forgiveneſs, and that without the moſt remote encouragement to ſin.

Nor is this all, for Chriſtianity, while it chalks out the ſecureſt path to happineſs in this life, teaches and encourages thoſe who walk in it, to look forward to the rewards of immortality in a future ſtate. The great apoſtle Paul, on a retroſpect of his paſt conduct, though before his converſion he had been a perſecutor and a blaſphemer, cheriſhes, in the near proſpect of a violent death, the utmoſt confidence in the divine mercy, and the moſt animating proſpect of a bleſſed immortality. *I have fought a good fight, I have finiſhed my courſe, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me, a crown of righteouſneſs which the Lord, the righteous judge, ſhall give to me at that day: and not to me only, but to all them alſo, that love his*

appearing

appearing. And, in the ſame epiſtle, he ſays that, *the purpoſe and grace which was given us in Chriſt Jeſus before the world began, is now made manifeſt by the appearing of our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt, who hath aboliſhed death, and hath* φωτισαντος *fully made known life and immortality by the Goſpel.* [z]

My laſt obſervation is, that *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, at the ſame time that it is a ſignal proof of *the truth of Chriſtianity*, is likewiſe an awful example to all future ages of the divine vengeance on a guilty nation. The deſtruction of Jeruſalem was a deciſive iſſue of the controverſy between our Lord and the Jews, concerning the true nature of the

[z] Our common tranſlation aſſerts, what I do not think the apoſtle intended, viz. *that life and immortality was* BROUGHT TO LIGHT *by the Goſpel*; for we have many proofs in the goſpel hiſtory, that the Jews believed in the doctrine of a future ſtate; and the belief of the immortality of the ſoul and a future ſtate, as Dr. Leland has obſerved, obtained among mankind, in the earlieſt ages; of which we have all the proof, that a matter of this nature is capable of. This learned writer adds, that "We find it equally obtained among the moſt barbarous, as among the moſt civilized nations. The ancient Scythians, Indians, Gauls, Germans, Britons, as well as the Greeks and Romans, believed that ſouls are immortal, and that men ſhall live in another ſtate after death, though it muſt be confeſſed, their ideas of it were very obſcure." See Leland's Advantage and Neceſſity of Revelation, vol. ii. p. 268-9, &c. The apoſtle Paul therefore, could only mean to aſſert, that what had before been involved in much darkneſs and obſcurity, was now more diſtinctly and fully made known. And this appears to be the preciſe meaning of the original.

Meſſiah's

Meſſiah's character, as it ſhewed plainly, how much they had been miſtaken, when they ſuppoſed that he was to be a temporal prince, to conduct them to conqueſt and to univerſal empire. And when it is conſidered, that it was particularly predicted to take place in that generation, it forms, a moſt ſtriking evidence of the truth of our Lord's prophetic character. "We may ſafely," ſays the Biſhop of London, "conſider this prophecy as an unqueſtionable proof of the divine foreknowledge of our Lord, and the divine authority of the goſpel; and on this ground only, (were it neceſſary) we might ſecurely reſt the whole fabric of our religion. Indeed, this remarkable prediction has always been conſidered, by every impartial perſon, as one of the moſt powerful arguments in favour of Chriſtianity; and in our own times, more particularly, (the Biſhop obſerves,) a man of diſtinguiſhed talents, and acknowledged eminence in his profeſſion, and in the conſtant habit of weighing, ſifting, and ſcrutinizing evidence, with the minuteſt accuracy, in courts of juſtice, has publicly declared, that he conſidered this prophecy, if there were nothing elſe to ſupport Chriſtianity, as *abſolutely irreſiſtible.*"[a]

As to the example, which the puniſhment of the Jews exhibits to ſucceeding ages, it is, indeed, a moſt awful and affecting one; an example, which,

[a] See Mr. Erſkine's ſpeech at the trial of Williams for publiſhing Paine's Age of Reaſon, and the Biſhop of London's Lectures, vol. ii. p. 180-1.

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at this eventful and calamitous period, muſt have a ſtrong tendency to impreſs the moſt hardened and inſenſible. Europe is bleeding at every pore, and now lies proſtrate at the feet of a tyrant, the moſt execrable that ever diſgraced the human form. And what renders its preſent ſituation the more tremendous, is, that, humanly ſpeaking, the hopes of deliverance are dwindled almoſt to a point. Political ſagacity appears to be completely at a loſs to deviſe means of deliverance, from the gripe of a power, whoſe ambition is inſatiable. The nations of the continent are, at this moment, drinking deep of the cup of vengeance, and there ſeems but too much reaſon to apprehend, that ſtill greater calamities are yet in reſerve, in which our own nation may be deeply involved; and the only melancholy privilege allotted us may be, that of being the laſt to be ſubdued. The deadly hatred, avowed by the haughty deſpot towards this country, is well known, and his recent declaration, that he will put it out of our power to diſturb the peace of mankind, i. e. to put a ſtop to his unjuſtifiable ambition, renders this highly probable. We have hitherto indeed reſiſted, and, in my humble opinion, nobly reſiſted this common enemy of mankind; and far be it from me, to diſcourage the exertion of thoſe energies which have been ſo honourable to us, and which, I truſt, will ultimately be ſucceſsful; but it cannot be denied that the clouds are gathering thick around us, and are apparently ready to burſt over our heads.

It would be as eaſy for the Ruler of the univerſe, to work out our deliverance, as it has been to raiſe up him, who is now become the terror of the world, to be the ſcourge of mankind; but, have we deſerved ſuch interference? Is there that regard to religion, that love of truth, that hatred of vice, in all its forms, which might have been expected from a people ſo highly favoured as we have been? Is there not, rather, a moſt lamentable tendency to infidelity and irreligion among us; a ſcandalous neglect of public worſhip, and an immorality of conduct, both in high and in low life, that has created the moſt ſerious alarm in the minds of good men? Are there not the ſtrongeſt appearances of noiſy pretenſions to patriotiſm, ſolely with a view to the poſſeſſion of power, and a venality and corruption, that is barefaced and unblushing? And, as to reform, though the want of it is every where complained of, though *reform or ruin* has long ſince been proclaimed through the land,[b] we ſee but feeble traces of it; and, it is at leaſt, a doubtful matter whether inſtead of our becoming better, we are not, as *a nation*, growing worſe.

When we conſider theſe things, theſe ſigns of the times, as Biſhop Newton and many other good men have obſerved, the ſtouteſt and moſt ſanguine of us all, muſt tremble at the natural and probable conſequences of them. God give us grace that we

[b] See a well-written pamphlet, entitled *Reform or Ruin*. By John Bowdler, Eſq. 1798.

may

may *know, at leaſt, in this our day, the things which belong to our peace, before they are hid from our eyes.* Never may ſuch blindneſs happen to us, as befel the Jews; never may we think that our mountain ſtandeth ſo faſt that it cannot be moved! Our ſea-girt iſle will ſtand us but in little ſtead, if Providence thinks fit to puniſh us. Means are never wanted to effect the purpoſes of the Supreme Ruler of the world, either to puniſh vice or to reward virtue.

APPENDIX.

Containing ſome Remarks upon Mr. KETT'S *"Hiſtory the Interpreter of Prophecy."*

THE preſent imperfect ſtate of ſcripture criticiſm is no where more ſtrikingly viſible, than in the vague and looſe manner which has been adopted by all denominations of Chriſtians, in their quotations from it. This practice was long ſince obſerved and condemned by the great Mr. Locke, and, more recently, by the late Biſhop Newton, and by the preſent Biſhop of Llandaff. See p. 2, 3, of the preceding work.

I am compelled to take ſome notice of what I conceive to be a practice of this ſort, adopted by Mr. Kett, in his Hiſtory the Interpreter of Prophecy; for, if his quotations in different parts of his work are properly applied, a great part of my reaſoning, in the preceding pages, muſt neceſſarily fall to the ground. As the cauſe of truth is deeply concerned in this matter, as well as the ſucceſs of my labours, which however, comparatively ſpeaking, are of little conſequence, Mr. Kett will not, I truſt, be offended at my pointing out, what appear to me

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to be ſtriking inſtances of his miſapplication of ſcripture to ſubjects to which they do not in reality belong. If this charge ſhall prove to be unfounded, Mr. Kett will have a fair opportunity, either of vindicating the propriety of his quotations and of ſhowing the fallacy of my reaſoning, or of acknowledging that he has miſtaken the ſenſe of them.

Mr. Kett is, with the preſent Biſhop of London, the profeſſed advocate of the double meaning of the prophecies of the New Teſtament, and his principal argument for it appears to be this, "that if the prophecies of the Old Teſtament are allowed to admit of *a primary and of a ſecondary* accompliſhment, there appears to be no reaſon why a ſimilar mode of interpretation ſhould not be adopted reſpecting the prophecies of the New Teſtament." See vol. i. p. 312. And, in the following page, he obſerves that, "we ſhould be cautious in reſtricting the ſenſe of any (prophecies) to one particular period, excepting thoſe which are evidently thus confined by ſcripture."

It does not appear to me to be neceſſary to enter into the queſtion, though a very important one, whether the prophecies of the Old Teſtament do actually admit of a primary and a ſecondary accompliſhment; [c] becauſe all thoſe prophecies

[c] The reader, who is deſirous of information upon this ſubject, will not be diſappointed, if he conſults Dr. Benſon's eſſay

prophecies with which I am more immediately concerned, and which Mr. Kett appears to me to have misapplied, are actually confined to *a particular period*. Our Lord's prophecy of *the destruction of Jerusalem*, in particular, which I suppose to be closely connected with all the rest, is absolutely, and in the strongest terms that language will admit of, restricted to the generation then existing. *All these things shall come to pass in this generation.* This Mr. Kett has himself admitted, in the fullest manner. "Our Lord," he says, "expressly declares, that *all these things*, that is, the solemn train of predictions concerning Jerusalem, *should be fulfilled before the then present generation should pass away.*" See p. 251.

Mr. Kett, indeed, does what he can to do away this restriction, by saying, in p. 248, that, "in their *secondary sense*, these words may mean, *this people* (the Jewish nation) *shall not pass away till all be fulfilled*; however dispersed, they shall continue a distinct people from the rest of the world, till the whole of this prophecy shall be accomplished, by the second coming of the Son of Man in glory." But is not this rendering his own remark absolutely nugatory, that those prophecies, which are evidently confined by scripture, are excepted? If such lan-

essay concerning the unity of sense; to shew that no text of scripture has more than one single sense. The learned Bishop of Llandaff has given this essay a place among his valuable collection of tracts, and has given a character of it, which justly entitles it to an attentive perusal.

guage,

guage, as our Lord has made uſe of, to reſtrict this prophecy to *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, be inſufficient, and may be evaded by the introduction of a ſecondary ſenſe, and that ſenſe too extending to very diſtant ages, I do not ſee what is the uſe of language, or what reſtriction may not be evaded!

Mr. Kett ſays, vol. ii. p. 284, "he has examined our Lord's prophecy, as far as relates to paſt events, and ſhewn to refer with equal certainty to the latter days;" and, in the following page, he ſays, "it requires no words to prove that a great part of this prophecy is actually fulfilling at this moment;" and then he puts a long ſtring of queſtions, taken from this prophecy, to prove that it is now ſo fulfilling. But is this fair reaſoning? Is it not taking for granted, what there appears to be no room for granting, but upon the abſurd ſuppoſition, that while our Lord limited his prophecy to a given period in the age in which he lived, he meant it of a very diſtant age?

I am, indeed, ready to acknowledge, that there is one part of this prophecy, which was much to Mr. Kett's purpoſe, ſo much ſo, as to preclude the neceſſity of his having recourſe to any *double meanings*; I mean, that *Jeruſalem was to be trodden down, till the time of the Gentiles ſhould be fulfilled*; but, further than this, I am unable, at preſent, to ſee any connection between this prophecy and the events which are now occurring, or are likely to occur. Mr. Kett, however, thinks otherwiſe, and has ac-

accordingly

cordingly applied the following paſſage to our Lord's ſecond coming. *Then ſhall appear the* SIGN OF THE SON OF MAN *in the heaven, and then ſhall all the tribes of the earth mourn; and they ſhall ſee* THE SON OF MAN *coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.* See vol. ii. p. 326. He has alſo, in p. 337, applied Mark xiii. 61, 62, to the ſame purpoſe. *And the high prieſt aſked him, ſaying, art thou the Chriſt, the ſon of the bleſſed? And Jeſus ſaid,* I AM, *and ye ſhall ſee the Son of Man ſitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.* But the paſſages parallel to this laſt, in Matthew and Luke, moſt diſtinctly confine our Lord's meaning to the events of that age. *From this time,* απ' αρτι, ſays the one, and *from henceforth,* απο του νυν, ſays the other. And this, as I have formerly obſerved, determines the preciſe meaning of the former of theſe paſſages.

I have, I think, in the preceding work, produced conſiderable evidence that St. Paul's deſcription of *the man of ſin,* relates to our Lord's prophecy of *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem.* [d] But whether

[d] Meſſrs. Beauſobre and Lenfant, though the profeſſed advocates for the application of St. Paul's language to the church of Rome, appear ſtrongly to have felt the objection to ſuch an application ariſing from the apoſtle's ſpeaking as if he alluded to the very times in which he lived. Toute la difficulté roule ſur ce que S. Paul, ſemble inſinuer, qu'il parle d'un evenément prochain, & qui pouvoit même arriver durant ſa vie. C'eſt ce qui à determiner de ſavans interpretes à chercher, dans

ther I am right in my interpretation of it, or not, I do not think Mr. Kett is juſtifiable in applying it both to the papacy and to that formidable power which has now riſen in France. And, as to the antichriſt of St. John, I will be bold to ſay, there is not even the ſhadow of evidence of his alluding to either of theſe powers; but, on the contrary, every evidence which can reaſonably be required, that it relates to the times then exiſting, if not excluſively to the falſe Chriſts and falſe prophets which our Lord had foretold were to ariſe, previous to *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*. Upon this laſt ſubject, there can, I think, after what has been ſaid, ſcarcely be two opinions.[e]

Far,

dans les premiers tems du Chriſtianiſme, l'accompliſſement de cette prophetie. The whole difficulty (of this interpretation) reſts upon this, that St. Paul ſeems to inſinuate that he ſpoke of an event which was *near at hand*, and which might even happen during his life. This is what has determined learned interpreters to look for the accompliſhment of this prophecy in the early times of Chriſtianity.

The anſwer which theſe learned commentators give to this objection is this,—Mais, Dieu, qui avoit revélé l'événement à S. Paul, ne lui en avoit pas révéle le tems. "But God, though he revealed the event to St. Paul, did not reveal to him the time when it ſhould happen." To which it may, I think, very fairly be replied, that though *the preciſe time* is not mentioned, yet it was ſufficient that he expreſsly ſaid it was *near at hand*. See the Preface of theſe Commentators to St. Paul's 2d Epiſtle to the Theſſalonians.

[e] Mr. Kett, it muſt be acknowledged, is by no means ſingular in his application of the term *antichriſt* to times more diſ-

Far, however, very far am I from denying that very important prophecies are fulfilling in the awful events that are now taking place in the world, or that theſe events will not ultimately be productive of a new and a better order of things. Some of the paſſages which Mr. Kett has produced are, in my humble opinion, deciſive upon this ſubject.

tant than thoſe of the apoſtles, but he very juſtly obſerves, that, "in no times was *caution* in interpretation ever more neceſſary than in theſe, when *party* ſpirit in religion and in politics, is ſo prevalent as to mingle itſelf almoſt imperceptibly with the thoughts of almoſt every man's heart," p. 315. vol. i. In this I perfectly agree with him, and I am very far from attributing to Mr. Kett a party ſpirit, either in religion or in politics (eſpecially as I have no knowledge of his character but what is highly creditable to him;) but I muſt ſay, that to aſcribe the term *antichriſt*, as a prophecy of St. John, to the papacy, to Mahomet, and to the Infidel power of France, is more than any man, reading the epiſtles of St. John, abſtractedly, could ever have imagined. Mr. Kett's remarks on the papal power, as one branch or form of *antichriſt*, have, I confeſs, no weight with me, nor conſequently on the other branches. To St. John's epiſtles, and to them alone, is my appeal, and on them I reſt my diſſent. It is for Mr. Kett to prove, what I am perſuaded he has not done, nor ever can do, that the prophecies of Daniel, and in the book of Revelations, are ſynonimous with *the antichriſt* of St. John. The book of Revelations has not even mentioned the term *antichriſt*, and I muſt beg leave to add, that the authenticity of this book, if Michaelis and others are to be credited, is of ſo doubtful a nature, that no appeal to it in matters of controverſy can ſafely be made, at leaſt without an acknowledgment—that it is doubtful.

But

But I do not think that there is any evidence, at leaſt Mr. Kett has not produced any, that *the new heavens and the new earth* mentioned by St. Peter, in his 2d epiſtle, relate to this ſubject; or that *the coming of Chriſt*, which he mentions as the ſcoff of infidels, meant *his ſecond coming* to introduce the reign of a thouſand years. The arguments that I have adduced, that both the epiſtles of St. Peter have a ſpecial relation to the *firſt coming of Chriſt*, and to the happy change that would take place in the world, by the introduction of Chriſtianity, are very ſatisfactory to my own mind. And I am the more confirmed in this opinion, by the language which, in other parts of the epiſtles, is adopted by St. Paul. *If any man be in Chriſt, he is a* NEW CREATURE: *Old things are paſſed away, behold all things are become* NEW. *We are his workmanſhip* CREATED *in Chriſt Jeſus. In Chriſt Jeſus neither circumciſion availeth any thing nor uncircumciſion, but* A NEW CREATURE.

This language, it muſt be obſerved, is highly figurative, and implies no more than that the change in the moral and religious ſtate of mankind would be ſo great, as to appear like *a new creation*; and ſuch it really was, when the Gentile world embraced Chriſtianity. That this fair fabric of Chriſtianity might not itſelf, in proceſs of time, be greatly defaced and ſo damaged as to want repair is no where ſaid, or ſuppoſed, but rather the contrary. And we, alas, in theſe degenerate days, have

have ſeen it, in a conſiderable proportion of what has hitherto been called the Chriſtian world, almoſt in ruins; but how, or by what means, it is to be reſtored to its priſtine beauty and ſtrength, I preſume not to ſay, only in general terms, that I believe it will be ſo, and that probably the events which are now paſſing in the world will be introductory to it.

THE END.

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